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THE FALL AND RISE OF THE ANICOM: THE SITCOM GENRE IN U.S. TV ANIMATION (1960 – 2003)

NICHOLA M. DOBSON BA (Hons)

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Abstract

The thesis examines the animated sitcom, from 1960 until present, and attempts to locate its development within the genre of situation comedy. Television animation has long been regarded among film, television and animation theorists as a 'lower cultural form' than its theatrical, or 'live action' counterparts. This thesis seeks to establish a pattern of generic development, in a form which has been critically and theoretically neglected over that time.

A lack of a consistent definition within critics and theorists has subsequently led to a lack of a coherent canon of theory. It is for this reason that animation is approached from several areas including film theory and cultural studies. Through original empirical research, the thesis examines the animated series in terms of its generic status, and contributes to the debates surrounding definitions of animation and the question of genre in animation.

The thesis charts the development of the series, and presents the term 'anicom' to convey the unique nature of the form, its contribution to the sitcom genre and the larger form of animation as a whole.

Dedicated to Jonny, Elise and Alice.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Development of the animated series

Over the last forty years the number of animated series has grown to become a major staple in television schedules and include some of the most popular television shows currently on prime time in the US and Britain. This thesis examines the development of the animated series and raises particular questions about genre, television genre and genre in animation.

For many years, the most common format for the animated cartoon was the seven-minute variety originally released in theatres; these are typified by Warner Bros.'s "Looney Tunes" and "Merrie Melodies" shorts. By the early 1960s, the format of cartoons was changing. There was an increasing demand for children's programming on television, which required the industry to produce animation to fill half hour time slots.[1]

One result was the emulation of the variety show, already popular in live-action comedy, stringing a number of shorts together to create one half-hour show. This process changed again when television networks developed programs for primetime, which would be suitable for the whole family. The first animated sitcom to prove successful in primetime, Hanna-Barbera's *The Flintstones*, was based on characters in a popular live-action sitcom, *The Honey Mooners*.[2]

The Flintstones focused on the relationship between two couples, set against a prehistoric background. Using dinosaurs to provide examples of new

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[1] In America, the 'half hour' is not actually thirty minutes long, since advertising takes up part of the air time. Today, an 'half hour' animated show runs about twenty-two minutes.

[2] *The Flintstones* first aired in primetime on 30 September 1960, but it moved to a daytime slot the following year. *The Flintstones* was produced for six seasons, from 1960 to 1966.

'technology', the show was an amusing commentary on consumerism in America and led the studio to develop other animated sitcoms that aired in primetime, such as *The Jetsons* (1962-1963) and *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* (1972-1974). The relative success of these and other series proved that made-for-television animation could be marketed to a wide audience, appealing to adults as well as children.

The animation industry as a whole—and particularly made-for-television animation—was depressed through most of the 1980s. However, that downturn changed with the arrival of *The Simpsons* in 1989. This new cycle of animated sitcom has developed both generically and as a form. *The Simpsons,* and a number of other anicoms, differ from other forms of television animation in their employment of live-action narrative conventions commonly associated with sitcom series.

One of the observations noted in undertaking this research is the apparent gap in the literature in this area. The sitcom has been discussed in a number of texts, (such as Grote (1983), Jones (1992), Marc (1997), however the discussion of animated series within this space has been limited with little consideration of the shows as anything other than sitcom. While this suggests an element of an imposed generic status on the form, the authors rarely question the development of the animation, or any contribution the form has made to the progression of the genre.

This lack of discussion of the animated sitcom is also apparent in the field of animation studies. Though there have recently been texts which attempt to remedy this (Wells 2002a, 2002b), this discussion of the animated sitcom is still

incomplete which I believe is due to the vastness of the field of animation studies overall. Wells states in his introduction to *Animation and America*, "It remains then to address the evolution and development of animation in the United States with a greater degree of openness, taking into account the distinctive vocabulary of animation itself." (2002a p.16). However while he devotes a chapter to the discussion of the animated sitcom, comparing *The Flintstones* to *The Simpsons*, there is still a great deal of work to be done in the area. Wells attempts to address a number of areas in a small space, and while he succeeds in much of this it still leaves questions as to the full development and 'value' of the animated sitcom and the implications of this development on the sitcom genre, which in part form the basis of my study.

There is a tendency among animation theorists to focus on theatrical work, or less 'mainstream' animation, taking a poor view of animation produced for television. However, I feel it is this view which has led to this area's neglect for so long. Animation studies has long suffered at the expense of its live action counterpart film, now widely studied. Initially film studies too fought to be recognised as a legitimate area of study, and animation is suffering the same fate. However, this recognition of the importance of animation can never be fully achieved while the theorists and historians within the field continue to reject forms within the field deemed 'less worthy'.

In this thesis, I argue that the development of the animated sitcom has played a vital role in the development of animation as a form. The medium which has been marginalised in favour of live action cinema, and to a lesser extent television, has been rejuvenated in part by the successful development of

animated sitcom in the last ten years. (Improvements in production technique have obviously helped the recent theatrical 'boom' however; the audience has been encouraged by the prevalence and popularity of recent television animation). However, there is still a distinct reluctance by animation theorists and historians to engage with the animation in question, namely the animated sitcoms produced by the Hanna Barbera studio throughout the 1960s and 1970s.

My thesis attempts to develop a theoretical model for the historical development of television animated series, which I argue can be classified as animated sitcoms – what I term the 'anicom'. The question of genre in animation has long been neglected; particularly in relation to television animation, therefore a substantial part of the thesis will discuss the Hanna Barbera studio and their animated sitcoms. The form will be examined through a series of case studies spanning four decades. The relationship between the institution and the audience is discussed throughout the thesis; this combined with the textual reading of the shows is key to the engagement with the anicom's definition of genre.

This thesis will be examine the extent to which it is true that "animated [films] pose particular questions of [these] generic definitions by virtue of their intrinsic difference as a form and as a mode of production which enunciates its own process" (Wells 2002b p.44) and whether animation will "ultimately be defined by its own generic terms and conditions." (p.45)

My methodology is of an empirical nature rather than a theoretical one and draws on a combination of literature based research and case studies of specific animated series which will be the subject of textual analysis. This analysis of specific animated series seeks to demonstrate a generic classification which

emerged with the introduction of the animated series, first broadcast in a prime time slot, in the 1960s, which parallels the generic development of the live action sitcom of the same time. The case studies will provide evidence which will enable me to answer the question of the generic classification of these shows.

To do this I will study the developments of animated series using specific examples as case studies throughout, ranging from *The Flintstones, Top Cat, Yogi Bear* and *The Jetsons* in the 1960s, to *The Simpsons, King of the Hill* and *Futurama* in the 1990s and present day. The case studies will include comparisons to contemporary live action sitcoms in an attempt to define a generic classification for these animated series. The thesis then goes further to attempt to establish a pattern of development in the anicom, which I will demonstrate has changed a number of times, largely affected by institution, audience, the regulations and politics of the networks and the politics of the US as a whole, all of which has enabled a new cycle of progression and variation in the genre.

Summary of Content

This introduction is followed by a literature review, which will enable the development of the theoretical framework which will be used throughout the case studies. As previously suggested there is a significant gap in the literature that my thesis will address. However, in order to carry out my research it is necessary to look outside the field of animation studies in the construction of a useful framework.

As I am arguing that the animated series is worthy of generic classification within, or as a sub genre of, the live action sitcom, it is necessary to examine the

fundamentals of genre theory to understand the conventions of the sitcom. I suggest that it is necessary to utilise both film genre theory, as well as that specifically written on television as the animated sitcom shares many of the characteristics present in film. This examination is presented through the narrative structure of the animations, which I will discuss in terms of genre, the comic narrative and narrative in animation. The theories on narrative are largely informed by the Russian Formalist theories of Todorov, Propp and Bakhtin, whose works are of major influence in narrative theory in film and television.

The literature review goes on to discuss animation, presenting the problems surrounding the animated series as marginalised even by animation historians, as well as focusing on the narrative in animation. It is my intention that this section will highlight the need to address this area of study. The end of this chapter will present a hypothesis of a generic model which will be used in the examination of the animated sitcom, and in the proceeding chapters.

Chapter three begins the case studies with its examination of the animated series of the 1960s, the decade which saw the first animated series on US prime time. The textual analysis of the individual shows' episodes forms the basis of the discussion which will demonstrate a generic 'match' with the live action sitcom. The chapter considers the development of the animated sitcom in terms of the generic conventions of the live action sitcom and the shows own cultural verisimilitude. The final section of the chapter further examines the narrative structure of each episode. This provides a more detailed assessment of the shows in terms of Todorov's fundamental theory of narrative (1981) which has been

adapted by Marc (1997) in the assessment of the sitcom narrative (and is used throughout).

Chapter four follows with the 1970s, a decade in which the number of anicoms had decreased, and a decline in the popularity of the form was becoming apparent. As well as an examination of the individual shows, this chapter attempts to establish reasons for this decline which ultimately impact on the anicom and the perception of television animation until the late 1980s. As in the previous chapter, the narrative section provides a fuller account of the generic development and structure of the shows.

In chapter five, the continuing decline is examined in more detail. With no anicoms between the years 1975 – 1988 to analyse, I turn my attention to the external factors such as the political climate in the US in the 1980s, and how that impacted on the regulations imposed on the networks surrounding content and quality of the shows broadcast. The chapter suggests that there was a decline in the sitcom genre overall, which in turn influenced, or affected change in the anicom. The chapter also considers the increasing commodification of animation throughout the 1980s, and how this impacted on the shows and their content.

In 1989 a new anicom was launched which would fundamentally change the genre and, indeed impact upon the popularity of animation as a form. In chapter six I begin by examining *The Simpsons*, a key anicom – as the first to be broadcast in prime time, in fifteen years - and as such has been subject to a number of studies (Irwin et al. Ed. (2001), Pinsky (2001), Alberti (2003), Keslowitz (2003)). Chapter six also returns to the textual analysis of episodes,

this time focusing on the anicoms of the 1990s and into 2000. The chapter charts the re-emergence of the anicom, and its continuing generic development.

As the decade that saw the largest number of anicoms produced, this chapter is the longest of the case studies. The shows are examined using the same generic framework as those in the earlier chapters. The generic status of the shows is fully examined at the end of the chapter, as well as suggesting advances in the development and progression of the genre.

As well as assessing the generic status of *The Simpsons*, chapter six looks at the 'constructed realities' in the show and the relationship the show and its producers has with its fans. *The Simpsons* phenomenon is evident in the wide range of websites on the Internet which fans can use to find and share information and critiques of their 'favourite' show. Through the observations of the discourse surrounding the show, the chapter demonstrates the acceptance of the genre with fans which have enabled *The Simpsons* and shows like it to develop throughout the 1990s.

My final chapter offers some conclusions as to the generic development and status of the anicom and its relation to the live action sitcom. This chapter sees the emergence of another shift in the anicom, in which the shows are, scheduled less in prime time, and are less reliant on the 'big' networks for support, instead seeking this from cable channels with more flexibility in their broadcasting regulations. It also takes the discussion of the 'shift' of the anicom further, suggesting potential further study in an emerging area.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The thesis examines the 'animated sitcom', and attempts to locate its development within the genre of situation comedy. The 'animated sitcom' has been present, though somewhat sporadically, in the US television schedules for the last forty years. This thesis seeks to establish a pattern of generic development in a form which has been critically and theoretically neglected over that time. The initial consideration of the literature suggests that there is an apparent gap in the literature surrounding television animation and in some respects the literature on television genres. 'Animation studies' as a theoretical field is difficult to locate. This is particularly due to the fundamental, but ongoing debate surrounding the very definition of animation itself. A lack of a consistent definition within critics and theorists has subsequently led to a lack of a coherent canon of theory. It is for this reason that animation is approached from several areas including film theory and cultural studies.

Due to this fragmented theoretical framework, animation is often marginalised as the poor relation of live action film. When we look at television animation, this marginalisation of form appears to be threefold. The cultural value of animation is placed below film, television is below film, and television comedy is an even lower form again. Thus, television animation is positioned very low in the hierarchy. This is reflected by the critics of animation and will be examined further later in the thesis, but is particularly evident by the very lack of literature on the subject.

Television studies to a certain extent, suffers as a comparative, but less worthy, field to film studies. This is partly due to the vast subject area which television

studies covers, from drama to comedy. According to Geraghty and Lusted, television has always been compared to radio and cinema as 'a home theatre.' However the situation comedy has been viewed as the 'lower form' of culture. (1998 p.97) This was seen to change with Raymond Williams and Horace Newcomb, who 'validated' the popular comedy form, but given the lack of literature even since Williams, I would argue that there is still a sense that television comedy is marginalised in favour of television drama, and more frequently live action film. This is evidenced by the very lack of literature on the sitcom in comparison to the vast amount available on all aspects of film studies. John Corner suggests that television studies requires 'consolidation' due to a lack of consistency in theoretical approaches. While these varieties of approaches also hold true for film studies, several aspects of television differ substantially in practise, problematising the field even further.[3]

With all of these inconsistencies in mind, it is my intention to address the 'gap' in the field of animation studies. This will be achieved by examining the literature on television studies (specifically on the sitcom), genre, comedy and narrative theory, as well as animation, in order to establish a theoretical framework which will then be applied to the chosen texts for the case study analysis.

Due to the variety of formats in animation it is essential first of all, to examine the animated sitcom structure for evidence of difference from the chosen animation to that of other cartoons. In order to understand what marks them out

[3] "First of all, the various aspects of television as a process (economics, regulation, policy, production, programmes, audiences, influence etc.)...Secondly, generic interests (drama, news, documentary, comedy etc.)...Thirdly the linking of television with other aspects of culture and society (television and violence, television and family...television and cultural economy.)" Corner (1999 p.2)

there are a number of areas which require to be analysed. The animations themselves will be the subject of textual analysis case studies, but the parameters of the analysis need to be defined, which can be identified through an analysis of the literature which informs the research.

Genre

The first key area to be examined is genre, which will provide an understanding of the form of the sitcom (live action and animated), and how it distinguishes itself from other forms of comedy and television genres. Though there is literature in television studies which focuses on the content of individual programme genres, the research is informed by genre studies of film, as there is an extensive body of work in the area and is therefore useful to examine initially as a general theory of genre. Steve Neale has written extensively on the subject of genre, focusing on cinema, and has produced a body of work which is regarded as authoritative on the subject. Two of Neale's key texts will be examined here: 'Questions of Genre' from *Screen* published in 1990 and the more recent *Genre and Hollywood* published in 2000[4].

One of Neale's key themes is that of verisimilitude, which he suggests is "central to an understanding of genre, as is the question of the social and cultural functions that genres perform" (1990 p.45). These 'social and cultural functions' relate to Neale's next main point pertaining to the importance of the audience, which as the thesis will demonstrate are of equal importance to television. He goes on further to note as a second major theme that, "Genres do not consist

[4] This text re-visits Neale's earlier *Genre* (1980), but updates his theories. I found the original text to be too similar to his *Screen* article, therefore the newer text was a more thorough reworking.

only of films: they consist also, and equally, of specific systems of expectation and hypothesis which spectators bring with them to the cinema, and which interact with films themselves during the course of the viewing process." (p.46). This 'system of expectation' can also be applied to television as the audience, or spectators, will bring the same expectations with them as they do to film. Their familiarity with the perpetual nature of television allows for the same interaction as cinema audiences. This interaction and expectation will be a key factor in development in the animated sitcom (and will be examined further in later chapters).

Verisimilitude requires further explanation, which Neale provides by referring to Todorov whose fundamental work on narrative suggests that there are 'two broad types of verisimilitude': generic verisimilitude and social or cultural verisimilitude. Todorov noted that the term verisimilitude could be problematic as it is commonly used to refer, incorrectly, to 'realism'. The term more correctly refers to the "text's conformity to a textual norm external to it. This conformity produces the *illusion* of realism" (1981 p.18). Generic verisimilitude occurs when the text conforms to the 'rules of the genre' and Neale refers to Aristotle to further explain, "verisimilar is not a relation between discourse and its referent (the relation of truth) but between discourse and what readers believe is true" (Neale 1990 p.47). This further suggests, that the generic verisimilitude of the text (film or television programme) is dependent more on the audience's understanding and acceptance of the text, than on the 'conventional' notion of realism. This is also the case with Todorov's second type of verisimilitude, social or cultural verisimilitude, where the audience's acceptance is dependent on

their interaction with the surrounding social or cultural conventions displayed in the text rather than solely with the conventions of the genre.

Neale has suggested that the distinction between the two types of verisimilitude has been blurred in recent genre studies, somewhat devaluing the term. The merging of the terms becomes, "generic knowledge...a form of cultural knowledge, a component of 'public opinion'" (p.48). The audience's acceptance of the generic conventions (as far as they know them) has become more important than the conventions, or rules which originally define the genre in the first place. While I agree with Neale's argument, and continue to do so throughout the thesis, I would suggest that the 'blurring' of the terms is largely due to the industry (in Neale's case film), but particularly the US television channels which ultimately control what is broadcast, and as a result what the audience can consume. Caughie argues that the term 'public opinion' is problematic when applied to television, suggesting that there is no "integration of the audience which television increasingly recognizes as disintegrated" (1991 p.147). This is largely due to the increasing amount of choice in US programming, fragmenting the audience. The fragmenting of audiences becomes key in the discussion on genre development in chapter five.

This public opinion is essential to 'institutional discourses,' which are constructed from within the film industry in 'publicity and marketing,' and which relate to or rely on the audience's expectations. However there is another type of genre discourse, the theoretical discourse. "A distinction needs to be made, then, between those studies of genres conceived as institutionalized classes of texts and systems of expectation, and studies which use critically or theoretically

constructed terms as the basis for discussing classes of films" (Neale 1990 p.52). This distinction will prove to be useful later in the thesis when discussing the genre of the animated sitcom.

The development of genre theory became evident when, in the 1960s and early 1970s, American film journals had begun to look at genre as an individual area. One particular art critic, Lawrence Alloway[5] "...made the case for paying more attention to genres and cycles, arguing that they were fundamental not just to Hollywood but to popular art as a whole" (Neale 2000 p.11). Again, I would suggest that this could be applied to television as well as the development of television, and genres within it, and is an integral part of my argument. These first stages of 'genre categories' led to the emergence of a theory of genre which developed in part due to industry terms of classification (Neale 2000), but also in audience expectation, [institutional genre & theoretical genre] though as previously suggested, the two are not mutually exclusive.

Caughie suggests that genre discourse goes further than Neale's 'institutional' and 'theoretical'. It is more complex as there are, "...two distinctions which seem useful for thinking about television genre: a distinction...between historical and theoretical genres, and...between elementary and complex genres." (1991 p.137). Caughie returns to Todorov's definition of the terms as "the result of an observation of literary phenomena [historical]" and "theoretical genres...deduced from a theory of literature" (ibid). The elementary and complex genres are more problematic, the elementary defined as the "presence or absence of a single structural feature" and complex as "the presence or absence of a conjunction of

[5] This was pointed out by Gledhill (1963, 1971) (Neale 2000 p.11)

such features." Caughie then suggests that most of the work on television focuses on elementary genres, with little 'textual analysis' and, "...no scholarly history of the development of television form to compare with the histories...of early cinema." (Ibid.) He feels that this limits the development of television theory a point which I would agree with based on my initial literature search. While this reinforces my earlier argument concerning the lack of research in television studies, particularly surrounding genre theory (in comparison to that of film theory), it is my intention, however to address this lack of research on complex genres as well as advance my development of a useful definition of the animated sitcom.

These industrialized or institutional terms are useful as they provide historical evidence of genre definitions. These early classifications are provided from the examination of the supplemental marketing material, using examples of billposters, which present the films with 'ready made' genre definitions, such as 'western' or 'horror' (Neale 2000). Examining posters from different eras Neale argues that due to changing terminology and phrasing to describe films, perceptions of genre have changed over the years. He suggests that "Genres are inherently temporal: hence, their inherent mutability on one hand, and their inherent historicity on the other" (p.56). Genre is not static and therefore modification and diversity are natural occurrences, "they are also marked fundamentally by difference, variation and change" (Ibid.). However, Georgina Born (1993) questions the ability of television programmes to maintain a high level of success after years of repetition. "The mystery of repetitive genre production, then, is not so much how they may be radically transformed (by irony, parody, satire), but how they miraculously continue to be seductive, and to

innovate while remaining within existing rules, for so long." (p.232) Born is questioning how genre can remain appealing and innovative within the established rules of a genre. It is necessary then to examine the sitcom genre itself to determine these 'rules' and how they can be applied to the animated comedy.

Born's suggestion that genre is subject to change, being both 'repetitive' and 'innovative' further reinforces the problematic nature of genre definition. However Neale, referring to film, has argued that the historical development of genre, combined with audience's awareness, and changing expectations, allows genre to change while still conforming to generic conventions. Neale refers to Gallagher, who has also suggested that audiences have developed along with genre, thus enabling progression and change, "...he concludes, a 'superficial glance at film history suggests cyclism rather than evolution' as a more accurate theory of generic development" (Gallagher in Neale 2000 p.212). Neale supports this notion by arguing that there are "always genres...even when films are new" (p213). I would argue that there must be progression in the audience's expectations to enable any progression in genre. This concept is key in the examination of the sitcom genre throughout my thesis, as well as the larger question of whether progression is developmental or cyclical in the sitcom (live action and animated).

If genre is 'marked by difference', thus complicating the process of defining and categorising genre, even more problematic is the issue of trying to identify the different genres within particular film areas. This will be discussed further in

subsequent case studies that identify the generic conventions of the animated situation comedy, which will attempt to determine their generic classification.

As well as marketing and publicity, the industrial, or institutional discourse of genre can be informed by the ratings systems applied to film, which determines their exhibition and ultimately affects their audience's expectations. This will be applied to the scheduling habits of networks, which in television, directly inform the audience expectation and viewing experience. Though similar to the effect the film ratings system has in defining audiences the network scheduling is directly applied by the industry. Where the ratings suggest suitability of material for specific ages, the television schedules package programs specifically to target audiences in, often, genre specific time slots. Cinema does not control the screening of films so rigidly, though the admittance may be restricted to certain ages the films are generally available at all times. This distinct difference between film and television genre will be useful in my examination of the animated series on television and its institutional genre classification.

Discussing children's film Peter Krämer briefly examines the ratings system, suggesting that the most successful films have not had a child friendly 'G' rating but were at least PG-13 which, "signals their dual address to both children and parents" (2002 p.193). He goes on to discuss Disney and their production of successful 'G' rated films which he notes were mainly animated features, as were animated features by other studios. The use of a 'G' rating suggests that the film is suitable for children, therefore targeting a young audience.[6] As previously stated, television scheduling performs this same feature by placing shows in

[6] MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) regulations state 'G' General Audiences, all ages admitted.

certain time slots which are aimed for specific audiences. If a programme is shown in the late night slot it is assumed to have adult content, whereas in the US the Saturday morning cartoons are assumed to be children's viewing. This supports Neale's theory that audience's perception and expectations are crucial to genre definition. This assumption is made by the audience and reinforced by the networks in the marketing of the shows. This will be shown to be problematic when examining the content of the animated shows which feature in the case study. Many of these feature adult content, which subvert the conventions dictated by the timeslot. The importance of network scheduling of programs will be discussed further throughout the thesis.

Kevin Sandler also argues that the notion of rating is influential to the categorisation of genre.

> "Far from simply replicating industry categorisation, pre-viewing notions of a film's generic identity depend on multiple (often contradictory) sources: studio discourse (which, because it targets multiple audiences, usually offers conflicting genre cues), claims made by critics (who do not necessarily deploy generic discourse for the same reasons or in the same manner as other sectors of the film industry), and several networks of genre viewers (with no guarantee of alignment among home, office, church and bar evaluations.)" (p.201).

Referring to genre theorist Rick Altman, Sandler seeks to demonstrate the influence of the rating system on these 'pre-viewing notions'. As Sandler suggests, this can be used deliberately, "the generic terminology shared by audiences, critics and readers…derives heavily from…the production companies and the exhibitors" (p.202). In this way the film can be 'classified' in order to target a specific audience by utilising these preconceptions to full advantage.

This classification is similar to that used in television, which rates programmes for their audience's suitability, determined by age. The rating is displayed on screen at the start of the show. There is also an assumption with audiences to the suitability of shows shown during peak 'family' viewing times[7].

While I have suggested that elements of film genre theory can be usefully applied to television genre, specifically the notion of verisimilitude and the influence of the institutional discourse within television genre there are critics of film theory being used to describe television genre. Caughie is concerned with the 'assumptions' made in film genre theory, particularly with regard to what he terms 'categorisation more intense even than that of...Hollywood cinema' present in television genre. Caughie suggests that it is difficult to determine a 'television theory', with these 'assumptions' of genre in television, based on film theory, however he thinks they cannot really be applied to television in a useful way. This observation of a lack of a coherent television theory recalls my initial argument regarding the lack of literature on animation and television studies in general. Film theory is applied to both of them but as Caughie notes here, not always appropriately. However, as I have also suggested, film genre theory can be applied to television in terms of the fundamental concepts of verisimilitude and audience expectation. Caughie however, applies Neale's notions of repetition and difference to define a theory of television genre. "Questions of genre, of the organisation of repetition and difference, seem fundamental to television, not only as an institution and a discourse, but also as a form of subjectivity." (1991 p.128)

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[7] In 1976 the networks instituted 'Family Viewing Hour Practises' in which all shows broadcast between 8pm and 9pm had to be suitable for the whole family to view. (Jones 1992 p.234). This is similar to the UK 'watershed' of 9pm for the showing of 'unsuitable' programmes.

Caughie tries to approach the notion of television genre theory by looking beyond the program categories and question various elements, the first being 'value'. Caughie draws on Adorno and Horkeimer's discussion of the value of television, suggesting that they could not work beyond their critique of mass culture and therefore could not see the possibilities of difference, which in turn would allow a definition of generic difference. "In some revue films, and especially in the grotesque and the funnies, the possibility of ...negation does glimmer for a few moments. But of course it cannot happen." (Adorno in Caughie 1991 p.131) Though Adorno and Horkheimer make reference to the difference in 'high' and 'low' art, applying value judgements to animation such as, "'Betty Boop' as high, or acceptable as opposed to 'Donald Duck'" (p.130). As Caughie correctly points out, they fail to see possibilities of negation, or in alternative animations such as Warner Bros. 'Looney Tunes'. Caughie's use of the notion of 'difference' or indeed negation in the animation is further complicated when comparing modernist and postmodernist[8] film criticism.

> "Post modernist criticism...seems to challenge the security of values...renouncing the modernist insistence on difference and originality, and seeking value instead in repetition in its various forms: recombination, refunctioning, pastiche. But it is worth noting that at least for the criticism of popular culture, and of television in particular, this apparently postmodern move may have less to do with a radical change in the terms of value than with the fundamental shift of attention – and of political faith – from the text to the audience. Rather than finally rejecting difference as the central term of critical value, this criticism instead relocates value onto the difference of consumers: its is in consumption rather than in the text that originality and creativity are to be found." (p.133)

[8] The use of 'post modernism' here, and throughout, refers to the post-war period, of which the term generally refers, as well as the specific traits which postmodern film criticism identified, as outlined in Caughie (1991 p.133).

This rather lengthy quote needs to be unpacked. Firstly we need to examine the suggestion that postmodernism has provided a new form of difference through repetition. This difference seems to be have been common throughout television history, particularly within the animated sitcom, however this may be due to the nature of the comedy used within the animated format. Satire, parody, pastiche are used heavily and arguably have been in animated comedy for some time, since Adorno and Horkheimer's original criticism, [which pre-dates postmodernism]. In the noted preference of 'Betty Boop' over 'Donald Duck' they are referring to the capitalist notions of the Disney studio, however had they looked to the work of Warner Bros. they would have been aware of the amount of arguably subversive material being produced by another large studio corporation, and thus the possibility of negation in the animated form.

Paul Wells argues that the use of 'postmodernist' traits in comedy pre-dates the term 'postmodernism', and suggests it does not apply to animation due to the nature of its form. The elements described as inherent in postmodern film, such as irony, the 'real', and its representation (Wells 1998a p.183) are already present in animation, and have been for a long time. "Long before the determination of a concept of 'postmodernism'...the animated form inherently embraced the self-figurative, self-reflexive, self-enunciating characteristics that supposedly characterise the collapse of previously constructed views of 'modernity'..." (2002a p.110)

A second point to unpack is that of the shift of 'value' from the text to the consumer. The notion of the audience 'providing the value' and creativity is widely evident today (Jenkins 1992a), particularly the wide use of Internet web

space for interactive discussion forums. Such spaces allow the audience to play a more significant, as well as more visible, part of the feedback process with producers, and will be discussed in a later chapter in this thesis. The audience also plays a vital, if passive part in the scheduling of the shows through television ratings systems. These inform the network how successful, or at least how many people watched a particular show. The networks' use of audience viewing figures demonstrates an institutional acceptance of the 'value' that the audience can provide.

Caughie notes the difference in scheduling between British and American broadcasting, and thus the generic differences created. In the UK, "The choice presented to the viewers tends to be *between* genres and subgenres..." whereas in the US, "...the schedules...are stripped in a way which concentrates particular genres and subgenres within the same time slot" (1991 p.149). This direct competition results in the industry striving for innovation in shows to differentiate themselves from each other. This differentiation, "...leads, then, in the same direction as the aesthetic process of verisimilitude: towards innovation, generic mixing, mutation." This supports both Neale and Born's argument relating to the possibility of generic change and development. There are problems aligned with this however, in that the difference or "the subversion of convention is becoming conventional". As Wells suggests this subversion has long since been conventional in animation, and suggests that animated genres need a different explanation. This will be explored further in the animation section and throughout the thesis.

Caughie examines genre in more detail noting: "...no industry label exists – and in television there is increasing recognition by both critics and producers of cross-generic mutations which defy easy categorizations." (p.135). This is not specific to television as this genre mutation occurs in film and has been addressed by Neale (1990 p.54). Though seeming to dismiss the notion of an institutional discourse in television, Caughie suggests that the marketing, as well as the scheduling of shows can help to define its genre category, reinforcing both Neale's definition of institutional genre, as well as my earlier proposal that scheduling is part of this genre discourse. This can also be applied to the animated series. In my case studies I am concerned with those series scheduled in the 'prime-time' slot. Though other shows sharing the same narrative format are discussed they are distinguished from their evening counterparts by the network's institutional discourse and will be examined further in the case studies.

Still seeking a useful "development of television" (p.141) theory Caughie suggests that due to the difference in the form of television in different countries, for example the US and Britain, it is more useful to examine the narrative structures used in television. Caughie employs Bakhtin's theories of novelistic discourse to describe the narrative structure, and its use of 'time and space' in the television series. "Just as journal serialization affected the chapter formation...of the nineteenth century novelistic...the expectation of the break, mediated by the specific form of attention which audiences are believed to give to television...the television novelistic is organised around interruption rather than around closure." (Ibid.). This is applicable to any television show which is run as a series of programmes. The interruption is continuous, whether from one episode or series of a show to another, or even from within the show itself, scene from scene,

though in American television this is generally framed around commercial breaks. The narrative and generic structure of the sitcom is examined in more detail in the later sitcom section but is crucial to the development of the animated series and its generic status. Caughie suggests that the 'interruptable narrative' (Ibid.) is well suited to television and its audiences viewing habits. The development of the form is traced to previous forms of entertainment such as radio and theatre, which Caughie suggests is vital to the understanding of television genres, "...before we can fully understand the particular historical genres which appear under the labels of programme categories, and...before we can understand the forms of subjectivity which they imply, we need to place them in their historical and institutional relationship to the theoretical genre of novelistic narrative." (p.146). Caughie is right to suggest that the notion of the novelistic narrative is key to television theory as it describes a narrative well suited to the style of television and its audiences, as Caughie has previously suggested (p.145). It is particularly useful in the discussion of the sitcom, a specific television form whose narrative originated from radio and as Grote (1983) would argue, theatre as well.

Caughie also suggests that there are differences between genre conventions in Britain and the United States,

> "What can be said about the most recent generation of US television narrative subgenres is that they display on the screen a much higher awareness of the conventions they are operating than is the general rule on UK television, and they are therefore much more inclined towards an ironic or parodic re-scoring of generic regimes." (p.147)

Here Caughie returns to his earlier position on postmodernism providing generic difference, though again I would suggest he is looking at live action shows, not

animation. I would argue, in agreement with Wells' earlier point (1998a, 2002a) that the term postmodernism does not apply to a form which already exhibits 'awareness of the conventions' and has done so for many years before 'postmodernism'.[9]

In an attempt to further develop television theory Caughie suggests,

> "...that a more aesthetically and historically extensive theory of irony seems desirable for an understanding of television. Irony is at the same time a characteristic form of the contemporary imagination and a way of thinking the specific forms of engagement which the distractions of the everyday and the interruptions of its temporality might facilitate in television."(p.150)

Caughie goes on to explain that, "within a theory of irony, a theory of parody seems equally essential for understanding recent generic mutations. Such a theory of parody may point towards the condition of existence of...television's difference and negation" (p.150)[10]. The use of parody in television allows the programme makers to create the difference that Caughie refers to, though again this difference becomes the norm. However parody, like other 'postmodern' characteristics, is something which has long been a feature of the animated comedy and while proving useful to Caughie in general television theory the term is problematic in analysis of the animated sitcom. The use of parody is so frequent in the animated sitcom, as the case studies will demonstrate that it does not provide 'difference'.

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[9] See the Warner Bros. short *Duck Amuck* (1953) in which the protagonist, Daffy Duck engages with, and questions, the very conventions which define him by arguing with the animator while being animated.

[10] Caughie refers to Linda Hutcheon (1985), *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* London, Methuen

While Caughie has dismissed the 'agency of authorship' as insignificant to generic difference, Born seeks to address this in her critique of Caughie's paper by examining the role of the 'author', or cultural producer arguing that they have more influence on genre than Caughie would suggest.

The Comic Narrative

As we have seen in Neale, in all popular narrative forms there are key generic elements which inform the narrative and allow the reader to identify that form as the generic dominant. Neale suggests that it is "difficult to list exhaustively the characteristic components of individual genres...more elaborate definitions always seem to throw up exceptions." (1990 p.57) thus the dominant generic element in a text becomes that with which the text is identified by.[11] As the generic dominant of the sitcom is comedy, it follows that if the animated sitcom does indeed conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom as I seek to demonstrate through the case studies, then its generic dominant is also comedy. In seeking a useful definition of the animated situation comedy, it is necessary to examine the conventions of narrative comedy. According to Neale and Krutnik the term comedy, "...has two distinct kinds of meaning. It can refer to the genre as a whole...it can also refer to particular works." (p.16)

There has been little to describe the form of comedy, and the relationship between the humour in the jokes - what Jenkins (1992) terms the 'gag'[12] - and the overall linking device or story line, (which is perhaps key to the absence of literature on the animated sitcom). "This hesitation derives from a long debate

[11] The generic dominant is often seen in the iconography of the text, such as the setting, or costume in the Western. This enables the audience to identify the genre.
[12] Jenkins defines the 'gag' as "moments of comic spectacle" (1992 p.101)

within literary criticism about what the term 'comedy' means" (Palmer 1994 p.112). There is not always a clear relationship between the 'literary form' of comedy and 'funniness'. Though some critics would acknowledge that most comedies are indeed 'funny', it is not necessary for gags to be present in order for a show to be termed a comedy. "What lurks behind this obvious point is the recognition that much comedy, no matter how funny, commonly uses a narrative form which is not essentially dissimilar from realist narrative in general..." (p.113). While this use of the 'realist narrative' in comedy is prevalent, in the television series, as well as in the sitcom, it is appropriate to return to Caughie and examine the narrative structure of the shows as examples of the novelistic narrative. Bordwell (1985) argues that Bakhtin's 'novelistic' is less limited in its approach to that of 'classic realist narrative'[13] and while Bordwell is examining film narrative I would agree that the novelistic is more suitable to the animated sitcom, which supports Caughie's earlier assertion that the novelistic discourse is useful in television studies.

Palmer goes on to state, "...the difference is based largely in the perception that funniness is no more than a passing pleasure, whereas comedy is a narrative form that in itself tells us something about the world around us."(p.114) Thus 'authentic comedy' (Palmer's term) has to possess more than a generic verisimilitude, but also social and cultural verisimilitude which is central to genre definitions. This would suggest however that the only truly generic comedy is one where observational humour is used providing cultural verisimilitude, thus

[13] Bordwell examines MacCabe's theory of the 'classic realist text'- "that the classical text takes reality as a given, on the one side, with language irrevocably on the other" (1985 p.19) and compares it to Bakhtin's approach, suggesting that MacCabe's ideas are limited "under one dominant discourse". (Ibid.)

any other form which only employs fantastic forms of slapstick cannot be considered 'comedy' in a generic sense.

This theme is continued in Jenkin's *What Made Pistachio Nuts...* (1992), with the examination of early sound comedy and specifically the vaudeville style in America. Like Palmer, Jenkins examines the notion of narrative structure, using examples from the comedy films from the early 1930s. The overall conclusion reached here agrees with Palmer that the joke, or gag, and narrative are not clearly linked, "...narrative causality becomes subordinated to the popular demand for comic spectacle...plot exists primarily to create opportunities within which gags and comic performances may occur." (p.106)

Jenkins demonstrates this with a highly detailed description of comedian Jimmy Durante's 1934 film *Hollywood Party* to illustrate how convoluted a plot could become in an effort to contain as many 'gags' as possible.[14] The result was extremely disappointing for all involved so that, "its more fragmented style of narrative was already starting to lose favour with film audiences..." (p.126). Again 'funniness' and 'comedy' are being considered as separate entities. My examination of the animated sitcom suggests that there can be a successful combination of both gag and narrative causality. This reinforces Neale and Born's notion of the development or cyclism of genre.

Jenkins and Palmer's assertion that the generic conventions of comedy are demonstrated through culturally reflective narrative or numerous gags linked by 'plot' suggest a distinction between two forms of narrative comedy: the comic

[14] *Hollywood Party* (1934), has two writers credits to it, Howard Dietz and Arthur Kober, but no director credit. (Internet Movie Database www.imdb.com)

narrative and narrative interspersed with 'gags'. However both can occur at the same time as I will illustrate in the later chapters. The narrative flow of the comedy is not necessarily disrupted by the insertion of a gag, as Richard Dyer has demonstrated in regards to musicals, the songs do not necessarily disrupt the narrative, rather they add to it and fulfil the audience's expectation of the generic conventions of the musical.[15] Thus the generic expectations of the audience for comedy is presence of gags intertwined in the comic narrative.

Narrative Structure

Having considered the generic conventions of the narrative comedy, we must now look at the narrative structure. Abercrombie examines the structure of the television series suggesting that, "Each episode may be complete in itself, but there is rarely any sense of resolution across the series itself; continuity is provided, not by narrative, but by character or location." (1996 p.11) The importance of the characters and location forms the basis of the structure of situation comedy. Narrative forms tend to be very similar across genre as demonstrated in Propp (1970) and Todorov's (1981) fundamental theories of narrative. Todorov's theory of equilibrium states that the narrative features an event which disrupts the equilibrium or 'harmony' of the narrative. This is then resolved and the equilibrium restored, however "the second equilibrium is similar to the first, but the two are not identical" (1981 p.57). The 'second equilibrium' is a key element in the animated sitcom structure which becomes evident through the case study analysis. Propp suggested that all narratives

[15] Dyer examines the musical in 'Entertainment and Utopia' in Dyer (2002) *Only Entertainment*, 2nd ed. New York, Routledge, suggesting that there are three types, "those that keep the narrative and number clearly separated...those that...try to 'integrate' the numbers...and those which try to dissolve the distinction...thus implying that the world of the narrative is also (already) utopian." (p.28)

contained 31 common events or 'functions', as well as a defined group of characters which were occurred in most of the narratives he examined.

Here we begin to see that comedy requires some type of separate narrative. The structure of the situation comedy can be defined as the classic realist narrative, illustrated by Propp and Todorov and observed by Palmer (1994). The basic character types described by Propp are common in the television comedy series. Likewise the concept of equilibrium is important in the structure of the situation comedy.

Sitcom

Having examined generic conventions and definitions, and the narrative structure of the comedy series, we can now consider the sub-genre of the situation comedy. Various approaches to the analysis of sitcom can be identified, ranging from histories of the development from the early days of radio comedy; the political and social aspects of the shows; the content and textual analysis of the shows themselves; to the influence and continuing development of the styles of humour and structures adopted by contemporary sitcom writers. These varied topics, have been studied with respect to both British and US sitcoms.

Sitcom - Definitions

> "If we are to understand the revolutionary nature of the form of situation comedy, we must examine the form as it uses both kinds of situation, the situation of the individual episode and the situation of the series as a whole. When both are considered, it becomes obvious that the sitcom is like no other form of literature and shares almost nothing with what we have always known as comedy." (Grote 1983 p.61)

In *The End of Comedy*, Grote examines the nature of comedy, differentiating the situation comedy as a sub-genre within comedy. In doing so he looks at ways to define the sitcom as separate from the types of comedy discussed by Palmer and Jenkins. "...it rejects comparison with even the most generalized forms of literary comedy." (p.66) Here Grote is suggesting that despite my earlier assertions that the realist, or novelistic narrative would be useful to apply to the sitcom, it is a comic form like no other. However he provides a useful structural comparison, "The makers of the sitcoms encourage us to believe we are part of a larger audience with 'live' tapings and laugh tracks. So, ultimately it is to the comedy in the dramatic tradition that the sitcom must be compared." (Ibid.) I would argue that while this comparison may be accurate in terms of the performance of the sitcom, its use of a narrative described by Todorov would suggest that it does indeed compare to literary comedy.

However Grote also proposes that the key to defining the sitcom is the 'situation' itself, as well as the sitcom following a specific narrative formula. "The shape of this formula may be seen every week: there is a problem; after much consideration, the problem is solved, but in such a way that no change results. Everything goes back as it was at the beginning of the episode."(Grote 1983 p.68) The situation at the end is the same as that at the beginning, despite any number of 'events' which may have occurred in the meantime. The balance or 'equilibrium' is restored, ready for the next episode. While this may have been the case when Grote's text was written, recent examples of sitcom, both live action and animated provide evidence to the contrary. The end of the episode more closely follows Todorov's 'second equilibrium' theory.

Marc similarly suggests that the plot of each episode must end with the situation the same as it began, regardless of the events which unfold during the episode itself. Marc demonstrates this using 'an abstract equation':

> "Episode = Familiar Status Quo => Ritual error made => Ritual lesson learned =>Familiar Status Quo" (1997 p.190)

(While Marc does not specifically conform to Todorov, it is a useful equation which will be used throughout the case studies). The main question is then how you can have a narrative without change or development to progress it. In the sitcom it is the 'situation' which does not change. While there may have been a lesson learned through the course of the episode, the character's situation is what remains unchanged, or returns to its earlier state.

Each episode takes on the form of a closed narrative, with a resolution to each story. "The basic plot of the television situation comedy is a circle rather than a line." (Grote 1983 p.66) thus the situation comedy's use of the restoration of equilibrium conforms to the narrative structure as described by Todorov, and not that of the 'dramatic comedy' as Grote had previously suggested.

Grote argues that the sitcom should not, though it could, be viewed as independent from the series. He suggests that the character dynamics are essential to the sitcom and therefore the audience requires some level of previous knowledge of the series to understand the current situation. "The audience is expected to know not only who the characters are, but also where they are and why they are there." (p.62) Though referring to the practise of syndication on television where shows are re-run he suggests that shows are indeed viewed

'independently' from the series, "Many times, there is no sequence" (p.61). The audience must be able to watch the show without any previous linear history.

However "No matter how brilliant the material in an episode of a television situation comedy, it cannot stand alone." (p.63). Despite the potential for independence from a series, the audience not only benefits from previous knowledge and understanding of a character's motivation, but this previous knowledge is vital to the watching experience.

Similarly Abercrombie discusses the problem serials face if viewers do not see every episode. They may have missed key plot developments, though many serials use time spans which last so long, it is easy to catch up with what may have been missed. This is not as problematic for the sitcom viewer with little, or less, plot development in the show. The prime example of this is the American soap opera. Soaps in Britain tend to have quicker turnover of stories; however, in their American counterparts a soap opera day can often stretch through a week of episodes, or even longer in some cases. The sitcom is able to utilise either of those narrative devices. Character and plot developments can occur over a period of time, including cliff-hanger endings in a season finale, (though this cannot occur too often), so that an occasional viewer could follow the storyline. "Within the general series concept, the character and performer must meet a new situation each week and must form a genuine ending." (Grote p.153) I would argue that the 'situation' in this case is not the overall situation of the show, the setting, but rather the 'event' or 'ritual error' which has occurred. It is probably for this reason that so many sitcoms continue to rerun in syndication, long after

they have ended, and the closed nature of the narrative of each episode allows viewers to watch any episode as an individual entity.

I have argued that the sitcom structure follows the formula of a particular situation occurring with a resolution to restore the equilibrium at the end of the episode. Another generic feature which occurs is the format of the show in terms of the space occupied by the characters of the show. Traditionally the early US sitcom was concerned with a domestic setting featuring a family unit, either couples as in *The Honeymooners* (1955-56) or *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (1961-66), or as a family with children in shows such as *Father Knows Best* (1954-60), or *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-63). The television comedy family in the traditional domestic sitcom style is made up of virtually the same common group, "...Mom, Dad, the kids, the house, and the pet were the formula." (Grote p.72) Alternatively, the family can be in the form of co-workers, bar 'chums' etc. "The family members make a self-contained and self-supporting unit within that situation, a unit that rarely has contact with other persons who in the real world would be necessary for the work to continue." (p.80)

From the mid 1960s, sitcoms expanded the situation beyond the domestic[16]. The development of situations outside the home provided a greater forum for political connotations, according to Wells (1998b p.190). "Faced by the notion that domestic space might be redefined as a female space, the sitcom turned its attention to the working environment, both as a site for the implied extended family, and as a mechanism by which to reflect the construction of the television

[16] The political climate of the 1960s led to a 'deep escapism' (Marc 1997 p.106) with shows like *Gilligan's Island, Hogan's Heroes* and *McHale's Navy*. The shift was complete in the 1970s with workplace centred shows such as, *The Mary Tyler Moore Show, Taxi* and *MASH*.

world." (Ibid.) The changing political climate is reflected in the cultural verisimilitude of the show.

Though sitcoms are generally successful in syndication re-run, Grote also refers to situations where any attempt at 'difference' within the show can lead to commercial failure. The audience's familiarity with the show's characters can lead to problems when an actor attempts to move on to another show which leads to problems with a formula when part of the formula leaves it. "Two theories suggest themselves. One says that the audience simply sees too much of the performer of a successful comedy series...When he has overstayed his welcome, when the audience has lost interest in his activities and is looking for a little variety, they ignore him until he leaves" (1993 p.149). This presents a second problem in the formula when part of it becomes over familiar. Here Grote refers to Dick Van Dyke, who enjoyed success for many years in his original sitcom *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, whose later attempts to star in sitcoms failed fairly quickly. Since Grote's work was published, in the 1980s, the sitcom has developed, with new shows premiering every season on the major US networks. However the idea of an actor 'outstaying his welcome' is still very much in evidence, as the case of Michael Richards proves. He was a massive success in *Seinfeld*, but his own show has been less successful so far. There have been successful spin off shows which have proven more successful than the original, but with similar characters recreated in the spin offs, as opposed to the same actor playing a different character. Examples include *Frasier* (1993-2004) from *Cheers* (1982-93) and *Rhoda* (1974-78) from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-77). This demonstrates that the success of a show is not necessarily dependant on the actor in the role but on the audience's acceptance of the

character. Even when popular characters are transported into another situation they can still succeed, however popular actors are not generally so successful.

The majority of sitcoms follow the model described by Marc as: the beginning, a problem, a solution of the problem, and an ending returning to the beginning, with rare exceptions. This suggests that the nature of the problem is fairly superficial. They also all have a very similar number of characters, with similar types. Grote (1983 p.80), observes a commonality in the character grouping on popular sitcoms between the 1960s and 1970s, and concludes that the average number of main characters in a sitcom is five. He also identified several sitcom 'regulars' or stereotypes which can be any combination of the following: hero (or lead character); fool; scoundrel; innocent. This categorisation supports Propp's (1970) contentions regarding narrative theory, that all stories follow the same structure and contain the same basic character types. It is a useful tool when applied, (along with the average character number), to a range of shows. In table 1 we see that the average number of characters is indeed five, as Grote suggested, and most shows represent at least two of the character types.

We can apply the same formula to more recent live action sitcoms in table 2 and we find that the average number of characters is still five and all of the shows in the example feature most of the character types. The main difference between the recent sitcoms and those from Grote's example is that there is more of a tendency for the characters to alternate type, thus not conform to the typology. The shows are generally ensemble shows, where each cast member has relatively equal parts. These characters then rotate roles depending on which is the focus of a particular episode. I would argue that it is not necessary in an ensemble

Show	Date	Character Type				No. Char
		Hero	Fool	Innocent	Scoundrel	
I Love Lucy	1951	Lucy	Lucy		Ricky	4
The Honeymooners	1952		Ralph Kramden	Alice Kramden		4
The Dick Van Dyke Show	1961	Rob Petrie	Rob	Ritchie Petrie		7
Bob Newhart	1972	Bob Newhart	Elliot Carlin	Howard Borden	Carol Kester	5
*M*A*S*H*	1972	Hawkeye	Burns/Winchester	Radar	Hawkeye/Trapper	8
Mary Tyler Moore Show	1970	Mary Richards	Rhoda Morgenstern/Phylis	Ted Baxter		6
Taxi	1978	Alex Reiger	Tony Banta/Jim Ignowski (s2)	Latka	Louie De Palma	5

Table 1 - Live action situation comedy after Grote and Propp, 1950 –1980

Show	Date	Character Type				No. Char.
		Hero	Fool	Innocent	Scoundrel	
Cheers	1982	Sam Malone	Cliff Claven	Coach/Woody	Carla	6
Friends	1994	various	Joey Tribiani	Joey/Phoebe/Rachel	Chandler	6
Frasier	1993	Frasier Crane	Frasier/Niles	Niles Crane/Daphne	Martin Crane	4
Seinfeld	1989	Jerry Seinfeld	George Costanza	Kramer	Elaine Benes	4
Roseanne	1988	Roseanne/Dan		Connor kids		6
Married With Children	1987	Al Bundy	Al/Bud Bundy	Kelly Bundy	Peggy Bundy	6

Table 2 - Live action comedy after Grote and Propp, 1980-200

show for the same characters to maintain the same roles every week, in fact this may be the key to the longevity of the shows which follow this practise.[17]

The common characterisation Grote described is often accepted as stereotyping. This is reaffirmed in Wells (1998b p.185), discussing the early radio sitcom *Fibber McGee and Molly,* "Fibber, in many ways, anticipates one of the enduring stereotypes in sitcom, the white male, working class, buffoon, best represented by ...Jackie Gleason in *The Honeymooners*...and Homer in *The Simpsons*...". This character of buffoon, (particularly of the 'white, working class') or fool has been the subject of some discussion in both live action sitcom as well as animated over the last decade[18]. It seems, then that the notion of stereotyping has become an accepted generic convention of the sitcom (Jones (1992), Butsch (1995), Marc (1997) and Wells (1998b).

Sitcom - Development

David Marc's *Comic Visions* (1997) provides a historical and critical review of some of America's best and worst situation comedies. Marc briefly discusses the sitcom forerunner, radio, as an acknowledgement of its contribution to the development of the sitcom format and comedic styles and concentrates on in-depth discussions of the shows themselves.

Marc takes the sitcom format and divides the genre further by categorising the shows by different themes. Reinforcing Grote's notion of family, Marc explains that they can be domestic, focussing specifically on the home and family issues; work related, with colleagues in the work place; social with friends in a constant

[17] As of January 2004, *Frasier* and *Friends* entered their tenth season on air.
[18] Most notably in Wells (above) and Butsch (1995) whose paper has been of great influence to the area.

social setting such as a restaurant or bar; even magic related 'magicoms' (p.107), shows which had fantasy elements as the key storylines. Examples of these include *I Dream of Jeannie* (1965-70), *Bewitched* (1964-72), *The Munsters* (1964-66) and *The Addams Family* (1964-66). These shows concentrated on supernatural aspects and problems which occurred when mortals and monsters, witches or Genies mixed and lived in suburban America. These different themes suggest that sitcom itself is made up of many different sub genres within the comedy sphere, and indicates that the animated comedy series can be described as a manifestation of sitcom - the 'anicom'.

Marc analyses the new generation of sitcoms that had arisen in the early sixties, praising *The Dick Van Dyke Show* (TDVDS) for forward and politically correct thinking and style. This was noted as being despite the fact that creator Carl Reiner, who wrote the show based on his life as a Jewish writer living in New York, was drastically altered and replaced with a young Christian actor, Dick Van Dyke, the point being to make it appeal to a larger audience without offending anyone. Marc praised this particular sitcom, as being the ideal which others at the time should aspire to: "The commitment to achieving a modicum of racially integrated cosmicity and ethnic representation distinguishes the sitcom [TDVDS] from other early sixties prime-time hits such as *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *The Flintstones*" (p.96). Marc's argument alludes to the notion of network control which will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis. The acknowledgement of external social and cultural forces influencing the content of the shows is central to the development of the sitcom, as evidence of cultural verisimilitude, and as such will be applied to the case studies in charting the development of the 'anicom'.

Like Grote (1983) and Marc (1997), before him, Jones (1992) discusses the nature of the situation comedy, its structure, development and ability to change, in a historical context. However, where Marc's is an evaluation of classic examples of what he considers as the best sitcoms, and Grote's is a general analysis of sitcom structure, in relation to traditional notions of comedy, Jones examines the other aspect of the sitcom which is so prominent in US television, the Networks.

The development of the sitcom is examined in the following chapters; however it is useful here to look at the trends which led to this development which then allows the case study chapters to focus on the analysis of the animated series within this contextualisation. The success of *The Lucy Show* (1951-57) proved that America enjoyed zany humour but still the bland *Father Knows Best* lasted. "American mass culture was trapped in Springfield by far more than popular taste" (1992 p.108). This became clear during the late sixties when the political and social face of America had been radically altered with the ongoing involvement in Vietnam and a drug culture which was increasingly subject to media, and political scrutiny. The tastes of the nation were altering too and the networks had to introduce programming which would appeal to everyone without offending sensitive tastes. This came in the form of escapist sitcoms, Marc's 'magicoms', (1997 p.107) and will be discussed further in the case study chapters.

There was also an increase in the comedic style popular in Britain at the time, that of the highly political, and the high camp. It was the latter of the two options which the Americans decided to emulate. "Post war America was not

working out as planned, so the heroes who stood for public conscience in its most primitive form had to be mocked to ease the sting. Camp was the humour of queasy disillusionment." (Jones 1992 p.186) Though as Jones elaborates, "For all their clever ridicule, however, the camp comedies steered well clear of the really meaty concerns of mass culture: sex roles, the family, social relations." (p.186) Examples of this include the superhero, comic based show *Batman* (though not a sitcom) and the spy thriller *James Bond* spoof sitcom *Get Smart*. The camp comedies were successful, but perhaps the most successful sitcom to be based on a British comedy was *All in the Family*, based on the politically incorrect *'Til Death do us Part*. The royalist humour was replaced and 'Americanised' appropriately enough to become a huge success leading to a new generation of sitcom with a more subversive twist in the 1970s.

> "It should be said that strong opening ratings were a phenomenon of the times, since the sensation surrounding *All in the Family* (AITF) had trained the TV audience to feel as though every new over hyped sitcom was a cultural event not to be missed; the audience was generally disappointed." (p.229)

Jones suggests that the sitcom was now changed forever, and indeed the support for this brand of humour was clear in the continuing success of AITF. "The sitcom coalition of the '50's had been shattered, but a new one had been forged. This one would help carry mass culture into the '80's and nearly to the present."(p.248)

The issues of political influence on the sitcom inform the cultural verisimilitude of the genre and therefore affect the development of the genre as well as the individual shows.

In *Because I Tell a Joke or Two; Comedy, Politics and Social Difference,* Wagg describes the importance of the situation comedy, "an important, but ambiguous, institution in the pantheon of British popular culture" (1998 p.1), as demonstrated by the quantity of the programmes present in the schedules each week. This is of course even more apparent in America where there are an even greater number of programmes of this type. The chapter takes on the form of Marc's *Comic Visions*, which charts the historical development of the sitcom in America, though here Wagg concentrates on British sitcom and radio, with similar discussion of the radio plays which influenced the structure and style of the modern sitcoms.

Unlike some of the other comedy texts studied so far, including those published relatively recently, Wagg considers the changes in theme which became present in the late 1980s and in more recent comedy shows, including the use of postmodern 'features', as discussed by Caughie and Tudor. "A number of shows have been steeped in caricature, pastiche and postmodern irony, and their characters based on cultural or media stereotypes, rather than on occupants of a purportedly real world." (1998 p.24) This applies to a vast number of the shows from the aforementioned decades, examples of which Wagg discusses to illustrate this shift in focus in comedy, which can be located in the larger question of socio-political effects on the sitcom. However as previously stated the term postmodernism is not applicable in animation.

This 'shift' or development is observed by Wells who examines the political climate running parallel to the programs as to prove an influence to the themes present in many of the shows. "The sitcom creates comic structures which

legitimise the expression of a variety of politicised agendas..." (1998b p.181) This is generally included as satire or parody, or political agendas of the show's creator, writer or producer, as included with a light humour, so as not to obviously offend any viewers. Using the characters in the shows as the focus, to create a 'people- centred approach' and a broad appeal, the sitcom is able to "...mask many of the political dimensions which inform the programmes and which are essentially the chief thematics of the genre" (Ibid.). This suggests that the writers use subversion to counter network control and thus negation is possible in the sitcom.[19] Through the use of historic examples, Wells discusses the progressive nature of the genre and reinforces his previous argument that the sitcom can address political issues, "...because it consistently uses comedy in the negotiation of personal, moral and socio-political issues..." (p.182).

Generic Framework

Upon examination of the literature we can see that the situation comedy is indeed a unique genre within the comedy form. From its origins in radio comedies, the sitcom was created specifically for television. However it possesses particular structural elements which conform to the conventions of genre set out by Neale for film, thus demonstrating that the genre theory he proposes can be applied to television, or at least the situation comedy. The sitcom demonstrates its generic verisimilitude through the strict narrative structure the individual shows follow. This is further confirmed by the use of space in the sitcom which follows one of three settings, the home, the workplace or a social setting where the action is always focused, as well as the particular character typology present in the shows

[19] Kirkham and Skeggs examine the politics of sitcom in '*Absolutely Fabulous*: Absolutely Feminist?' in Geraghty and Lusted ed. (1998) *The Television Studies Book* London: Arnold

which conform to the genre. Having established this framework of generic conventions for the live action sitcom, we can examine the animated series which have been selected for the case studies in terms of this framework in order to establish whether or not they conform to the sitcom genre. It will also be necessary to examine the animations for evidence of social and cultural verisimilitude, and any progression of the genre which results from this. These areas of examination will provide the basis of a framework for analysis of the animated sitcom hypothesis which will problematise and develop the genre and surrounding literature.

Animation - Definition

The subject of 'animation' is one that is very difficult to define and continues to be the subject of debate between scholars in the field of animation studies. One of the key difficulties animation faces is its relationship with live action cinema, as a "second cousin to mainstream cinema" (Wells, 1998a, p.2), and as previously suggested its marginalisation as an academic field in relation to film studies and film theory.

Phil Denslow, at the fourth Society for Animation Studies Conference[20], suggested that the simplest way to define animation was to look to the dictionary definition, "a: a motion picture made by photographing successive positions of inanimate objects (as puppets or mechanical parts), b: Animated Cartoon, a motion picture made from a series of drawings simulating motion by means of slight progressive changes." (1997 p.1) Though this is the simplest, and most common understanding of what animation is, Denslow adds, "it reflects a limited

[20] Denslow's paper is published in a collection of SAS conference papers in Jayne Pilling ed. (1997) *A Reader in Animation Studies* Sydney: John Libbey & Company

exposure to what the artform has to offer." (Ibid.) But even animation scholars find it difficult to agree upon a clear definition. The dictionary is useful but seems to refer to animation in terms of the process itself rather than as an artform, separate from live action film. "Definitions of animation vary from each other for many reasons, including historical development, production and marketing requirements, and aesthetic preference." (Ibid.) Consequently a rather more useful definition used by the Association of International Film Animation (ASIFA), is that of animation as any film that is 'not live action' (p.2). This definition is of particular use as technology advances and animation forms develop away from 'traditional' dictionary inspired terms. As this new technology has developed the industry too has developed to adopt the new techniques and methods. However this development becomes problematic when the use of computer generated special effects are heavily used in live action films. The definition of animation is once more complicated by the dominance of live action cinema. The animated effects used within can become secondary to the live action, further marginalising the animated form in audience perceptions, as a tool for effects rather than a form in its own right.

The lack of a clear definition of animation is not just a problem for animators when describing and marketing their product, but also for the audience whose perception, as previously discussed, is a key element in genre definition. Animation has long been subject to the hegemony of the Walt Disney studio. Returning to Denslow, "In Hollywood, marketing or thinking about a film as animation automatically throws it into the sphere of influence of the Walt Disney Company. Disney and now perhaps Turner's cartoon channel on cable, control how most audiences define animation" (Ibid.) The majority of animation

literature concerns the work of the studio, which though it clearly played an important role in animation history, suggests to scholars and audiences that it is the only animation worth examination. "Animation...has become synonymous with Disney and thus other kinds of animation...have been further neglected." (Wells 1998a p.2). I am reluctant to discuss the hegemony and seemingly omnipresence of Disney animation due to its already vast literary attention. (For example, Byrne, E & McQuillan, M. (1999); Smoodin, E. (1994); Eliot, M (1993).

Another problem of definition is that animation has different meanings to those who produce it from those who receive it. For example many animators consider animation an art form, which is highly creative, while others who produce films with clear narrative structures often consider animation as a film making technique, as well as an art form. There is also the marginalisation of animation as a lesser art form by 'live action' filmmakers, as previously mentioned. This marginalisation in favour of live action film, and the difficulties of definition, even between animation scholars, has led to a fairly limited range of literature being produced on the subject. As previously suggested, there is no coherent canon of literature on the topic with the majority of texts either focusing on historical accounts of the studio systems, (particularly Disney, MGM and Warner Bros.), animation techniques or on specific animators. Those texts that discuss genre in animation do not generally include television animation. It is this gap in the literature which is the focus of this thesis.

Wells attempts to remedy the gap in animation studies in his seminal text *Understanding Animation,* where he discusses a wide range of animation styles,

including the methods of narrative in animation (discussed in the next section) and its use in comedy formats. He includes some discussion on the differences in animation forms, describing a type of 'true animation' a creative, expressive art form, "...avant-garde form of expression..."(1998a p.28). Here again, we find a contradiction where the animators who consider themselves artists, alter the definition to suit themselves. It is this elitist attitude to animation as an 'art form' of method of filmmaking which plagues commercial filmmakers as well as television animators.

As stated in the introduction (and start of this literature review) I believe the lack of a coherent definition of animation and the attitudes of 'artists' as animators, and critics has contributed to the marginalisation of the form. The Hanna Barbera studio, (the focus of my case studies), has been the subject of much criticism despite their Oscar winning animation, and an admired reputation for their excellent work as part of the MGM studio. After the closure of MGM, William Hanna and Joe Barbera set up their own studio to produce television animation. It is this work which has been maligned by animation historians. The Hanna Barbera studio used 'limited animation' techniques, which enabled them to produce vast quantities of entertainment with economically viable budgets. However it is in part the formulaic nature of the limited animation which contributes to its marginalisation, of the specific form of animation, and animation as a whole.

In *Hollywood Cartoons,* Michael Barrier charts the development of the cartoon as theatrical short from the 1930s until the late 1950s. He includes an after word that acknowledges some successful recent cartoons, both on television and on

theatrical releases however this is a rather empty gesture, as he reduces it to a comparison of the 'great classics'. While Barrier attempts to create a canon of 'classic animation' this acknowledgment of the animated series is not enough. He joins the critics of Hanna-Barbera's 'limited' techniques without any indication of their responsibility for the success of television animation, particularly of those shown in prime time. "Hanna and Barbera were eager to comply with television's harsh demands for quantity and predictability. They reduced the animation, the stories, the dialogue, and the characters to increasingly rigid and predictable patterns..." (1999 p.561). Like Barrier, Leonard Maltin charts the development of the cartoon, likewise using the final chapter to look at the decline in the theatrical short with the increase in television animation. He shares Barrier's opinion on Hanna-Barbera, suggesting that they, "...paved the way for a systematic destruction of the cartoon art form." (1987 p.344), though Maltin does give the studio a small amount of credit. "At first Hanna-Barbera cartoons compensated for their visual shortcomings with excellent comedy scripts..." (Ibid.), however he then goes on to mention the decline of quality in the work as the volume of work increased. This is something which I will examine throughout the case studies.

Texts of this nature tend to focus on Hanna Barbera's animation work on *Tom and Jerry* for MGM, with little mention of later work, other than to criticise their animation techniques. This has made the task of researching their work after this period fairly difficult, though my case studies of textual analysis of the animation itself will hopefully provide more evidence of their full contribution to animation. There are, however texts that celebrate their work in terms of popular culture, which though they are not fully discussed here, are useful in the case

study chapters. William Hanna's (1996) autobiography includes stories about the processes involved in the production of the animation, as well as valuable descriptions of the negotiations with the studios which resulted in the creation of *The Flintstones* and other cartoons specifically for a primetime audience. This text provides vital context to the production of many of the shows and in the development of the animated sitcom. *Hanna Barbera Cartoons*, (Mallory 1999) provides similar insight, which along with reproductions of the artwork, includes episode guides to the most popular series'. These episode guides have been helpful in cataloguing the episodes in the case studies, as well as charting the development of the Hanna Barbera shows.

Saturday Morning Fever (Kevin and Timothy Burke 1999) is a celebration of the culture of the Saturday morning cartoon phenomenon of the late 1970s and 1980s. The text examines the popularity, success and often failure of specific shows. Though not discussing primetime directly, many of the Hanna-Barbera shows, which will feature in my case studies, were originally scheduled in primetime but were subsequently moved to Saturday morning line-ups. The text focuses on the working methods of the studios, specifically on the politics involved, "In this environment, if particular programs proved to be serious political liabilities for the network they were replaceable." (p.21). As well as the politics of the shows there is significant discussion on the merchandising. The authors use a collection of reproduced images from some of the merchandise available at the time of broadcast, as evidence of the commercial nature of the product. Their conclusions on the commodification of animation, and subsequent marginalisation of the animated series, as well as notions of politics and commerciality will be explored in more detail in later chapters.

Animation – Narrative

While it is necessary to examine the narrative structure of television and comedy to identify the characteristics of situation comedy, it is also vital to understand the effect that the medium of animation has on the format. In *Understanding Animation,* Paul Wells provides an overview of the art of animation as well as the narrative strategies used to aid the process of storytelling. "Some narrative strategies will…be similar to those encountered in live action film…" (1998 p.68) thus the use of live action sitcom narrative is entirely appropriate in the analysis of the animated sitcom. Wells acknowledges the differences between live action and animated films while suggesting there are more similarities in the structure than would perhaps appear. Wells discusses the variety of strategies that animators can adopt in order to aid the narrative. Examples of which include;

Metamorphosis, where forms literally change to another form thus enabling the story to change or develop. One object may alter to appear as another which takes the viewer to another point in the story. Here we see one of the major differences between animation and live-action, "Metamorphosis can resist logical developments and determine unpredictable linearities…that constitute different kinds of narrative construction." (p.69). This unique ability to manipulate form in order to progress narrative marks out its difference from live action. However it can add to the shows 'awareness of its conventions' when the show deliberately uses this method to draw attention to the rules of the sitcom genre. The case studies include examples of where this ability to subvert reality, allows the animation to present scenarios which would be impossible in live action due to such constraints as time, expense, or in the case of *South Park,* censors. It can

QUEEN MARGARET UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LIBRARY

also provide a particular type of slapstick humour almost unique to animation, or rather rarely seen due to the decline of physical comedy in favour of stand up observational humour.

Condensation, which allows the story to be edited as if live action, using different camera techniques such as close –up, fades and camera angle changes. This can alter the viewer's perception of the film adding realism or abstraction (p.76). Just as the use of 'laughter tracks' invites the audience to feel part of the larger audience, the use of 'live action' film techniques add to the audience's acceptance of a familiar genre.

While the animation techniques can affect the audience's experience, one of the essential elements of the comic narrative is the use of *Sound*, "The soundtrack of any film, whether animated or live- action, tends to condition an audiences response to it..." (p.97) Wells lists the 'sound elements' which become the integral part of the narrative, as sound effects or score, often acting as the sole narrative device. (p.102) the soundtrack in Hanna Barbera animation is of utmost importance where the emphasis on the animation is 'lessened' by the limited animation technique. The focus becomes the soundtrack, providing effects, but in the case of the animated sitcom, most importantly the focus is on the next narrative strategy.

Acting and Performance. This is probably the narrative strategy in animation which is most relevant to my study, where the characterisation is vital to the continuing narrative of the situation comedy. "Though animated characters ultimately seem fairly limited in their motives, their range of physical expression is extraordinary." (p.104) The performance of the character is heightened through

the use of different types of shots, as in condensation, "...the camera...emphasis through the use of close-ups, medium shots etc." (p.105). This helps to create the 'hyper-realism' presented in such animated films as those produced by the Disney company (p.105), or in the case of the subjects of my analysis, provide realistic characters for the audience to relate to in the familiar structure of the sitcom and accept the show as such.

Animated Sitcom

There are several key themes which have emerged from the literature review which are integral to the thesis. Firstly, there is the problematic definition of animation in the creation of coherent canon of literature. My work in a long neglected area of study will seek to address the problems, as well as address the larger problem of the lack of literature.

Having examined the literature on animation it seems then that the initial suggestion of the marginalisation of the form is justified. There is a distinct lack of research on areas beyond those deemed as 'classic animation' and the research which is available focuses on production. Since the initial work on this thesis was undertaken, Paul Wells has published two texts, *Animation and America* and *Animation: Genre and Authorship.* (Both of these texts will be examined throughout the case study chapters). Secondly, despite this new literature there still lacks comprehensive research on television animation, and specifically that scheduled in primetime for an adult audience.

The subsequent case studies will examine specific animations over a period of four decades in order to establish whether there are patterns that are consistent with the generic conventions of sitcom, or indeed of a particular genre which this

group of animation can be identified with. As a result of the case studies I hope to further the discourse surrounding television genre theory, and the anicom.

Wells (2002b) suggests that the difficulty in genre definition in animation is partly due to the increasing hybridity of genre, though this is true of film and television as well as animation. "It is more useful to think of the ways in which particular narrative structures or values work within genres, or in the case we are addressing, within animation as a *form*" (p.41). In order to test the hypothesis that animated series can be defined as animated sitcoms (anicoms) within the genre of the sitcom, the case studies will examine the following: narrative structure; character and setting types; social and cultural references; scheduling details such as airdate and time, and network. These elements have all been identified within the literature as contributing to the generic conventions of the sitcom and as such will be applied to the animated series.

Methodology

Due to the empirical nature of my research the thesis combines literature-based research with textual analysis. The literature has largely been outlined already in this chapter however I will now outline my methodology for the textual analysis, and the reasons for my approach.

Criteria for selection

As well as a lack of literature on the subject of television animation, and (for my purposes) the Hanna Barbera studio (as the sole producer of the animated sitcom), there is a lack of literature available on the shows themselves. Mallory (1999) attempts to address this with *Hanna Barbera Cartoons* which features

episode guides and descriptions of some of the studio's most popular animation, as well as including a large volume of accompanying illustrations. The Internet also provides episode guides, though these are largely descriptive, and can be fairly limited to 'nostalgia' websites that rely on fans input, which can lead to inaccuracies in the content and unreliable statements about the shows. Nonetheless, given that these are often the only source on a particular show, qualified reference has been made to them as appropriate.

The availability of the older shows can be sporadic as they are only broadcast in the UK on cable channel 'Cartoon Network' (a UK version of its American counterpart). Selections of popular shows are also available on VHS, but again can be difficult to find (most retailers do not stock these shows). Despite these problems, however I was able to select a random sample of the individual anicoms. The anicoms from the 1960s and 1970s which are included in the case study are; *The Flintstones, Top Cat, Yogi Bear, The Jetsons, Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home, Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* and *Hong Kong Phooey.*

The newer shows (1989 onwards) were easier to obtain due to both VHS and DVD sales and frequent broadcast of the anicoms. The samples from these anicoms were selected at random and from across the entire run of each show. By looking across the entire life of the shows I was able to present a fuller representation of these series overall. The anicoms from 1989 to present (2003) included in the case study are, *The Simpsons, Dr Katz, King of the Hill, South Park, Futurama, Family Guy* and *Home Movies.*

Textual Analysis

The textual analysis of the shows is achieved through viewing the individual episodes, which are examined for the characteristics described above; character types, social and cultural references, setting, narrative structure, animation style and comedic strategies. These observations are then noted and compiled with episode guides and synopsis to provide full accounts of the content of the episodes. The results from the analysis are the subject of the case study chapters along with supporting historical (literature based) research, which provides context for the development within the shows and the genre.

This empirical research will, I hope, facilitate my contribution to the field which is currently lacking. The approach is appropriate in an area (television animation) with a lack of consistent theory, and therefore requires an appropriation of useful theory from other areas, film and television genre theory, and comedy theory. These theories, along with the textual analysis form a comprehensive base for my narrative analysis of the shows, as well as the assessment of the animated series' generic status.

Chapter 3 - The 1960s

The literature review highlighted a 'gap' in animation research, particularly in the area of the animated television series. In this chapter I will begin to address this gap through the examination of the animated television series and its development. I have suggested that the animated series shares generic characteristics with the live action sitcom genre and should be analysed by examining the conventions of the genre and the extent to which the animated series conforms to these conventions. This examination will be carried out through a series of case studies which, using textual analysis of individual series, and episodes seek to confirm the generic status of the animated series and provide the historical context regarding the industry.

This chapter will examine the US animated television series in the 1960s. It was in this decade that the first animated series was scheduled in prime time for an adult audience. The introduction of animation of this type will be discussed in terms of developments in television and the development of the series themselves. The studio that produced this animation was Hanna Barbera and will be the focus of this chapter, and discussed throughout the thesis.

An initial examination of the production list from the Hanna Barbera studio (Hanna 1996) suggests that there were several shows which could conform to the genre of the sitcom. This chapter will feature case studies of specific episodes which will be the focus of textual analysis. The literature review revealed a number of elements, described as characteristic of the sitcom genre. This model will be used in the examination of the episodes discussed to assess their generic status. These elements consist of narrative structure, character and setting types,

social and cultural references and scheduling information, including airdate and network. The shows which will be analysed are; *The Flintstones* (1960-66), *Top Cat* (1961-62), *The Yogi Bear Show* (1960-62) and *The Jetsons* (1962-63). The individual episodes were chosen to provide a cross section which is representative of the shows.

The literature on animation (Barrier (1999), Maltin (1987)) suggested that the television animation produced by the Hanna Barbera studio was of 'poor' or 'lesser' quality than the theatrical animation produced in the 'golden age' of animation. These attitudes which privilege theatrical animation over television animation are, in part, one of the reasons for the marginalisation of the form discussed in the literature review, as well as in the larger debate over the cultural value of television versus film. However I will argue that while the animation may have been technically, or aesthetically, inferior to Hanna Barbera's earlier work for MGM, it was inevitable that there would be distinct differences given the different production values of the two forms. The animation produced by the studio in the 1960s was for a specific purpose which was met, and in turn influenced other animators and studios. The circumstances surrounding the formation of the studio should be noted in order to understand the processes used.

In 1957 MGM closed its animation studio, leaving animators William Hanna and Joe Barbera, who had worked together producing *Tom & Jerry* cartoons, out of work. The studio closed due to the diminishing market for theatrical shorts as support for the main feature and the growing success of television which could attract larger audiences. The production costs for theatrical releases rose while

profits fell, prompting the decision by MGM to halt all production on animation, preferring to rely on a library of older cartoons which could be repackaged and resold (Hanna 1996 p.77). Television was a growing industry and thus the logical place for the animators to turn for work. Forming their own company, Hanna and Barbera began to produce cartoons specifically for television, initially for the Saturday morning children's market. They had to find a cost-effective way of producing the cartoons to meet the quick demand of regular television shows, which were primarily repackaging old shorts, "re-runs of old Columbia theatrical cartoons" (p.83) along with new shows such as *The Ruff and Reddy Show* (1957), as 'bookends' into the required half hour long format commonly used in television.

The shows were broadcast in black and white but produced in colour, anticipating the development of colour television and the shows being aired again in the future, repeated in syndication[21]. Still looking to reduce the costs, the studio adopted a style known as 'limited animation'. The films were shot using the same backgrounds to reduce costs and time. Financially the limited animation was successful as it enabled the studio to produce vast volumes of animation, within tight deadlines, but as previously suggested the style was heavily criticised. This criticism was addressed by William Hanna who suggested that limited animation provided the studio with a starting point on which to build their technique over time and without it animation may not have survived the transition from theatre to television (1996 p.134). "These are...analytical observations often made from the standpoint of reviewers enchanted by the sweep in motion picture cartoons...indeed visually wonderful

[21] Syndication is when networks sell programmes to independent stations for broadcast.

and marvellous examples of what can be achieved in production nourished by lavish budgets." (p.135) However in order to survive in an industry which required full half hour episodes every week, the studio had to adapt to the most suitable production method. Despite the criticism of the aesthetic quality of the technique, the production method was adopted by other studios keen to expand into the television market, as it proved successful in terms of economics, audiences and most importantly the critics, "reviews in the trade papers...gave high marks to *Ruff and Reddy* as an entertaining and clever cartoon program." (p.87).

Other studios, such as UPA, adopted limited animation techniques, though for different purposes from Hanna Barbera. "UPA had explicitly embraced limited animation as a method of evidencing their affiliation to modern art-forms, and different models of non-Disney, 'tradition-directed' animation" whereas "Hanna Barbera sought to embrace the established narrative codes of radio and television story-telling." (Wells 2002a p.88). This use of the radio and television narrative is central to the definition of the animated sitcom. The literature review discussed the narrative of the live action sitcom with its origins in radio and theatrical comedy, but also examined the comic narrative, all of which the animated sitcom appropriates. Wells argues that this television and child friendly approach left little room for 'subversion' in the text and compares the early Hanna Barbera characters Huckleberry Hound and Yogi Bear to the 'insane' Warner Bros. characters Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, respectively and finds them lacking. Wells suggests that there is a gap "between the 'text' and the 'social context'" (Ibid.) which enables the subversion, through the animated form. By not utilising this opportunity for subversion, Wells claims that the

animated series produced by Hanna Barbera, including *The Flintstones* led to a 'naturalised aesthetic' for television animation and while the animated sitcom referred to various aspects of popular culture it did not offer a critique. However through the case study analysis I will argue that while the anicoms may not have offered a critique, the ideological work of the narrative provided a commentary on contemporary society. The very use of 'narrative codes of radio and television signal more than merely an "otherness'...by virtue of its difference from live action performance." (p.89). This difference from live action while appropriating its narrative form suggests a potential in the animated sitcom to do more, and go beyond the live action sitcom.

The cartoons Hanna Barbera produced placed emphasis on the dialogue. The 'voice' rather than the sound became the key determining factor in changing audience perceptions. The focus was on the comic dialogue, the narrative rather than the style of animation.

Hanna Barbera's success in animated comedy[22] led to the ABC network, in 1960, to approach the pair with the idea of producing an animated show for primetime which would suit both children and adults, in an attempt to address the lack of 'family' entertainment being broadcast, and enable ABC to dominate in this market. They decided the best approach to move away from the children's Saturday morning shows they had been producing would be to change to the full half-hour format (a single show which lasted that long, rather than a compilation of shorter animation). The format would have to meet everyone's needs so they looked to prime time itself for answers. The situation comedy was already

[22] *The Huckleberry Hound Show* (1958-62) won an Emmy Award in 1959 (Wells 2002a p.88)

popular, therefore Hanna Barbera looked to the half hour comedy format for their new primetime show. To emulate the success of the existing night time comedy shows, sitcoms, Hanna Barbera decided to adopt their narrative structure and format. In doing so they combined the sitcom narrative with the comic narrative and elements of narrative which are specific to animation, particularly the use of 'sound' and 'acting and performance' as discussed in the previous chapter. There is also the use of both parody and slapstick, which used together, presents a unique type of comedy.

William Hanna describes the process that he and Joe Barbera undertook to develop the show,

> " Both Joe and I knew that if our cartoon plots were to play well to older viewers, they would have to have more of a sophisticated edge to them than the cute Saturday morning fare we'd been doing thus far. The humour would need a wit that adults could both identify with and relate with laughter. That meant a lot of spoofs in the comedy..." (1996 pp.113)

The live action domestic sitcom was already becoming established on the networks with shows such as *I Love Lucy* (1951) and Hanna Barbera knew that 'modern marriage' (1996 p.114) would provide a good theme for the show and looked to the schedules to find something which appealed to them. "What we wanted to work up was a perspective on married life that was saltier, somewhat irreverent, and possessed of enough oomph and open zaniness to take fullest advantage of the show's rich gag potential." (p.114) The popular domestic sitcom, *The Honeymooners* (1952)[23] provided the ideal model for the first

[23] The show starred popular comic Jackie Gleason and focused on a married couple and their neighbours.

animated series which would become *The Flintstones* and would appeal to the established adult audience as well as the kids.

The element of slapstick comedy was already an established tool in the cartoon industry as well as in live action comedy, and though these (slapstick) 'gags' would appeal to the children, they would need to appeal to the adults in the audience as well. *The Flintstones* also included visual gags which were satirical cultural references to the 'modern lifestyle'. The popularity and promotion, in the late 1950s and early 1960s of technological advances in household gadgets which promised to dramatically improve the housewife's life, were the focus of gags in several of the Hanna Barbera animations. Instead of a time or labour saving dishwasher, the housewife of the Stone Age in *The Flintstones* has a mammoth which sprays her dishes with water. This visual gag of the animal helping the housewife and often talking and addressing the audience is amusing to children and adults, but the adults will enjoy the reference to the time saving gadgets. This follows the tradition of anthropomorphism in animation, commonly seen in the work of the Disney studio as one of the, "design' orthodoxies in Disney animation" (Wells 2002a p.119). Whereas the anthropomorphisation of the animals in Disney were generally endowed with 'childlike' qualities and 'cuteness', the animals in Hanna Barbera anicoms, such as *The Flintstones* are specifically used to provide comic relief regardless of appearance. (In later Hanna Barbera shows this would be used for more than this, but rather the animals would exhibit 'adult' characteristics). This was a deliberate comic device employed in every episode, often several times. As William Hanna suggests, 'One of the most enduring elements of good comedy, I believe, is the open display of clever gags employed by characters who are

apparently oblivious to the humorous application.' (1996:120). Here Jenkins' (1992) use of the gag in the narrative is evident. However rather than a number of 'gags' linked together without any coherent plot as Jenkins has suggested, the gags, particularly the visual gags, in *The Flintstones* often occur as punch lines within the comic narrative. These examples of cultural references, though within the context of the stone age or space age, will be examined further in the discussion of the individual shows.

Hanna compares the characters to live-action comedy stars when discussing their delivery of jokes with 'straight faces' as though human actors play them. This investment in the characters by the show's writers adds to the generic realism of the show overall, which occurs in the characterisation. The character types present in the show are representative of the types found in the live action sitcom and will be assessed in the later sections of this chapter. The generic realism also occurs through the sitcom narrative employed by the animated series, particularly their use of the narrative formula identified by Todorov (1976) and applied to the sitcom by Marc (1997). The sitcom narrative typically features a ritual error of some kind which requires a lesson to be learned. This then restores the equilibrium of the episode, and the show.

The Flintstones

The show premiered on Friday September 30, 1960 at 8.30 on the ABC network. The show originally ran for six years, though there were a number of spin off series and feature length 'movie' episodes in later years.[24] After the premier aired, critics began their evaluation of the show, "Jack Gould, writing in...the

[24] Feature length, *A Man Called Flintstone* (1966) Screen Gems. TV series spin off, *The Bedrock Cops* (1980) NBC

New Yorker, dismissed the show as "an inked disaster" (Hanna 1996 p.119). However as William Hanna recalls, "...the audience elected to tune in – and as the ratings climbed, the critics' tone began to change..." (p.120) and *The Flintstones* was referred to as a "remarkably fresh cartoon" (Ibid.)

The show follows the same domestic sitcom structure as *The Honeymooners* and the same character grouping with two married couples, living next door to each other, Fred and Wilma Flintstone and their neighbours, and friends, Barney and Betty Rubble. As well as the supporting characters, such as Fred and Barney's boss, Mr Slate and Wilma's mother, there was another key member of the Flintstone household, the pet dinosaur, Dino. Dino was a large purple Brontosaurus which had all of the characteristics of a live action family dog, and behaved as such. He 'barked' and played 'fetch' like a live action dog, but was also a purple dinosaur. This is particularly notable in episode 61 which begins with Dino greeting Fred when he and Barney arrive home from work. Dino jumps up on Fred and licks him enthusiastically. This type of playfulness demonstrated by the family pet occurs in several episodes, but Dino is always treated as a regular dog. In later seasons the family expanded to include a child in each family, reinforcing Grote's family domestic sitcom formula, "Mom, Dad, the kids, the house, and the pet" (1987 p.72). Inevitably the children, Pebbles and Bam-Bam were best friends and became the focus of several spin-off shows which featured them as teens.[25]

The domestic setting is occasionally changed to follow the exploits of Fred and Barney at work, or in a social setting. Like many live action sitcoms of the time,

[25] *The Flintstone Kids* (1986) ABC

such as *The Honeymooners* (155-56), *I Love Lucy* (1951-61) and *The Burns and Allan Show* (1950-58), the narrative of many of the episodes focuses on male versus female power struggles. These usually pitted 'the boys' (as they were generally referred to in the show by the women) against their wives as they attempt to make their fortune in some elaborate scheme. The wives usually foil the scheme or help the boys restore the equilibrium, at the same time exerting their power over the boys as the dominant partner.

In episode 15 entitled 'The Girls Night Out', Wilma and Betty complain that they don't get to go out enough, so Fred and Barney agree to take them for an evening out. The episode suggests that domestic 'disharmony' is a frequent occurrence with the opening scene showing Fred eating his dinner outside on the step after an argument with Wilma. The show will end with the same scene restoring the equilibrium and continuity of the show. The 'familiar status quo' has been established in the opening scene (Marc 1997:190), with the 'ritual error' being that the boys take the wives to a fun park (the boys idea of a fun night out) rather than for a romantic evening and they all end up arguing. The scenario is set up with the wives demanding to leave as the boys are enjoying the funfair.

Meanwhile Fred records a romantic song for Wilma, but they leave quickly to appease the girls and leave the record behind. The new 'recording booth' Fred uses is a reference to new technology but here features a bird using its beak as a recording stylus. Another comment on the consumerism in 50s US is the photo booth.[26] Fred remarks "isn't science wonderful", but inside the booth is a man with a chisel. Fred's record is found, and in an Elvis Presley parody, Fred

[26] The Photo Booth was invented by Anatol Joseph in 1925, but became popular following WW2, particularly in the 1960s after they were used by artist Andy Warhol. http://photobooth.org/history

becomes the newest pop music sensation. His manager, like Presley's, is named 'Colonel' (referring to Elvis' famous manager) 'Colonel Parker'. The Colonel character makes comments throughout the episode about his previous star 'that Georgia boy' and wonders if his 'legs gave out'. These references add to the social and cultural verisimilitude of the show. By the time this episode was aired, Elvis Presley was very successful and well known to most people. The adult viewers would have particularly appreciated these verbal gags, as well as the commentary on the fickle nature of the music business. After three weeks of touring, the girls are fed up and long to go home. They set up a rumour to turn the teen fans off 'Hi Fye'/Fred and they return to their normal lives. The show ends with Fred eating outside as before. The situation of the episode has been resolved and the equilibrium ultimately restored as it is in every episode.

This episode illustrates the fundamental features of the anicom which are: sitcom narrative structure, comic strategy of anthropomorphism, comic strategy of setting (time), comic references to 1960s popular culture and the use of parody. These episodes which follow will be examined thematically and the use of the above features identified to further reinforce the features of the anicom.

'Stardom'

The inclusion of contemporary music, television and popular culture in general were common plot themes in *The Flintstones*, particularly the notion of fame and 'stardom'. In episode 61, 'Dino Goes Hollyrock' for instance, it was the family pet, Dino's turn to try a 'show business' career. This episode includes commentary on the television industry and a parody of the popular series

Lassie.[27] Dino becomes a star in the show 'The new Adventures of Sassie', the synopsis of which is very similar to the live action series except in this case featuring a girl dinosaur rather than a dog. Not only is the television program a parody of the live action show, but also a satirical comment on the television industry. When Dino sees the true face of his glamorous 'Sassie' when she doesn't have any make-up on, she is revealed to be a 'regular' dog and not the 'starlet' that Dino imagined. The actors are portrayed as impatient and spoiled 'stars'. The episode ends with Dino returning home after discovering the true price of fame. He discovers that, like the music business in the previous episode, Hollywood (or Hollyrock) is very fickle. Dino ultimately decides that he misses Fred and Wilma too much and that they are worth more than the fame.

The theme of stardom recurs in episode 65, 'The Twitch' with Fred, once more becoming the star, however in this episode it is Fred filling in for a star rather than becoming one himself. While trying to secure a musical act for Wilma's auxiliary benefit show, Fred meets a rock star (named Rock) with an unusual fondness for dodo eggs, which also cause an allergic reaction when he eats them.

The show's interest in Hollywood and celebrity was completed when celebrity guest stars started to appear on the show (in the 1963 season). The 'stars' to all intents and purposes played themselves, but with a 'stone-age' twist and pun on their name. Actor Tony Curtis appeared in episode 143 'The Return of Stoney Curtis', as 'Stoney Curtis' and actress Ann-Margaret was in episode 89 'Ann Margrock Presents', as Ann-Margrock.

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[27] *Lassie* the television series premiered in 1954

Popular culture and television

As well as the entertainment industry, episode 61 addresses violence on television in the content of the shows themselves. Fred and Barney watch the 'big fight' on TV, featuring guys standing clubbing each other, and say that it's better than 'Sassie', which is too violent. This could be a comment on the 'violence' in children's television, which William Hanna and Joe Barbera had previously been accused of with *Tom & Jerry*. Comparing Hanna and Barbera's *Tom and Jerry* with the episodes directed by animator Chuck Jones, Leonard Maltin describes their [HB's] style as a "chase-and-violence formula" (1987 p.307). By the 1970s Hanna Barbera attempted to create a new Tom and Jerry series for television, however they were told it was too violent. (p.308)

Episode 65 directly references television as Fred first sees 'Rock Roll' on a variety show in a reference to the popular *Ed Sullivan Show* which not only closely resembles the Sullivan's but the presenter also emulates Sullivan's catchphrase 'really big shew'.[28]

Technology

The 'stone-age technology' is always an important part of the show, and as we have seen usually involves an animal in the place of a mechanical object. The gag is both visual with the animals functioning as household objects, and verbal with the animals providing a punch line while addressing the camera. The anthropomorphism is taken further than the talking animals of Disney with the animals assuming a dual function as labour saving devices and commentators of

[28] *The Ed Sullivan Show* aired from 1948 until 1971. His pronunciation of 'show' as 'shew' is the subject of the gag.

the situation they are in. One episode (65) re-uses the record player bird, seen in episode 15, though this time the gag is that the record skips when the bird falls asleep. As well as referencing general household objects, dishwashers, waste disposal units, the show occasionally includes 'new' technology which parodies the 'real'. In episode 92 the 'Instant 'Polarocks' featured in a 'Polaroid' camera parody is more significant, as the first colour Polaroid was introduced in 1963, the same year as this episode of *The Flintstones*.[29]

Consumerism

By the third season the show had introduced the children into the character line-up, (Fred and Wilma's daughter Pebbles), transforming the show from a domestic sitcom featuring married couples, into a family oriented domestic sitcom. Later the Rubbles adopted a son Bamm-Bamm and the children become more of the focus of the episodes, than the previous relationship 'power' struggles between the boys and the wives. In episode 92, 'Dino Disappears' Pebbles plays an integral role in this episode, where the family pet Dino runs away when his anniversary of joining the family is forgotten. The attention Fred had paid to Dino in previous episodes has diminished due to Pebbles arrival. The episode begins with Dino doing tricks as Pebbles eats dinner; Fred ignores the tricks and instead lavishes Pebbles with gifts. The gifts include a 'Pebbles Doll', which says 'Yabba Dabba Doo' (Fred's catchphrase), and a dollhouse, which looks a lot like their house. She is also eating cereal which similar to the 'Pebbles' cereal. The episode is not referring to the cereals of the same name, "Pebbles' is actually named for the unique shape of the cereal, and not the

[29] Polaroid was first produced its black and white instant camera in 1948, with its first live advertisements on Steve Allen's *Tonight Show* in 1954 and many more developments through the early 1960s. www.polaroid.com

'Pebbles' Flintstones character."[30] All of these products resemble the merchandise which was available following the success of the show, allowing the show to satirise the consumer culture targeted at children, in this instance the merchandising of the show itself.

Sexual Politics

As exemplified in the first episode in the case study, 'Girls Night Out', the show often featured storylines commonly found in contemporary live action sitcoms, such as money making schemes which would result in no longer having to work, or the men against the women in a variety of schemes. Despite the 'stone age' setting, the situation epitomised 1960s America as evidenced in its representations of consumerism, celebrity and politics, particularly the gender politics as featured in shows such as *I Love Lucy* or *The Burns and Allen Show* which regularly featured conflict with the men against the women. The appropriation of these live action themes and features into the anicom enables the comedy to go further than simply emulating the live action sitcom, by combining a number of other features.

Narrative

The narrative structure of *The Flintstones* conforms to the live action sitcom narrative described by Marc (date). Each episode establishes a 'familiar status quo' in the opening scenes with the occurrence of a 'ritual error'. Through the events of the episode a 'ritual lesson' is ultimately learned resulting in a

[30] According to nostalgia website Postopia.com

restoration of the status quo, or equilibrium. Further discussion of the narrative appears in a later section of this chapter.

Returning to Grote's notion that the sitcom makers "encourage us to believe we are part of the larger audience with…laugh tracks." (1984 p.66). *The Flintstones* uses laugh tracks, despite the obvious lack of audience in animation, to conform to the generic conventions of sitcom and allow the audience to 'participate' in the 'larger audience'. This use of laugh tracks in the animated series informs the audience's expectations of the sitcom genre reinforcing Neale's argument that the audience's perceptions can shape the definition of the genre.

This examination of *The Flintstones* demonstrates that Hanna Barbera followed the generic conventions of the live action sitcom when writing the show as they had originally intended. However it also appropriated features of other forms such as the use of slapstick and parody as well as anthropomorphism, traditionally used in theatrical animation, but unlike anything seen in live action sitcom. These features of the anicom, as demonstrated in the first anicom *The Flintstones* provided a template for the animated series. I will argue that in doing so *The Flintstones* established the conventions for the animated sitcoms, or 'anicoms' which followed.

Top Cat

The next Hanna Barbera series which will be examined is their second prime time animated series, *Top Cat* which premiered on September 27, 1961 airing at 8.30pm on the ABC network. For this animated sitcom, HB took a different approach. Instead of a comedy based on the situation itself, such as a domestic or workplace setting, typical of the live action sitcom narrative form, the show

was based largely around an ensemble of characters and their relationships with each other. This was an unusual approach as the dominant live action sitcom in the 1960s was the domestic sitcom, however the show can be considered as a form of sitcom due to the stability of the situation, in this case the alley as the focal location forming a 'workplace' for the cats. The series 'starred' Top Cat, or 'TC' and his gang of alley cats. The cats were constantly trying to come up with (usually) 'money making' schemes, but were under the watchful eye of local beat policeman Officer Dibble. There was no unusual era, such as the 'stone age' of *The Flintstones* but the location for the show seemed to be New York City. Though no specific time period was given it is clear from the surroundings, and styles that the show was supposed to be set in the 'present', or early 1960s. This is also clear from the cultural references made throughout the series.

Though never explicitly stated, like *The Flintstones*' *Honeymooners* influence, *Top Cat* was very similar in plot and style to *The Phil Silvers Show* (1955) featuring the 'loveable rogue' Sgt Bilko. (One of the most interesting links to Bilko is that the voice actor, who played Benny the Ball, was a supporting actor in *The Phil Silvers Show*). Bilko led his men in a variety of moneymaking schemes, though never with any malicious intent. This is similar to Top Cat who leads his gang of alley cats in a variety of schemes and cons, always trying to keep one step ahead of Officer Dibble. The biggest difference is that the main characters in the show are cats, though they interact with humans, who seem to have no problem with talking cats. This follows in the tradition in animated cartoons featuring anthropomorphised animals as main characters. However in

Top Cat the characters are 'adult' in nature rather than the more common 'Disneyesque' cute or childlike innocents.

Narrative

While the first episode of the show introduces Top Cat's gang of alley cats and Officer Dibble, in this first episode, their relationship hasn't yet been established. The episode is not typical of the show as it is intended as an introduction. However it is clear immediately that the structure of this episode is similar to *The Flintstones* with incidental music utilised here in the same manner to link scenes, (though unlike *The Flintstones* there is no canned laughter). The situation of the show is introduced with the cats in 'their' alley, though they don't spend a lot of time there in this particular episode, it is established as their meeting place, essentially their workplace. The episode follows the narrative structure of the sitcom in terms of its length. However though the main 'gag' in the episode could be described as the 'ritual error' (a plot to stow away on a boat to Hawaii is complicated by a robbery, there is the eventual resolution of the problem when the robbery is foiled), the equilibrium is not restored at the end, as was typical in *The Flintstones*. This is seen again in episode two 'The Maharajah of Pookajee', where the end is not really a resolution to the equilibrium, but ends on a joke. The episodes seem to vary in their resolution, with T.C succeeding in some episodes and losing to Dibble in others.

Despite this difference in resolution of the shows, each episode does start in the same way with the situation set up in the alley, often with T.C summoning the rest of the gang from their various locations, implying a restoration of the equilibrium from the previous episode. In this episode Top Cat addresses the

'camera' or audience, directly, as to share the joke or pun. In this episode the gang's relationship with Dibble is established fully.

Though these episodes of *Top Cat* did not include the use of canned laughter, I later discovered that episodes eight and nine, (later than those included here), did have canned laughter. It is possible that later episodes used laughter tracks, however I was unable to view any episodes beyond those included in the case study.[31] It is possible that the laughter was added later in syndication in the same way that the live action sitcom *M*A*S*H* did. This show originally had laughter tracks when it was shown in the US but when it broadcast in Britain the laugh track was removed, as the audiences here seemed to prefer it that way. The use of laughter tracks, or lack of, to invite the viewer to feel part of the 'larger audience' (Grote 1983 p.66), is not an indicator of a show being a sitcom, however their use may reinforce the generic realism.

Sophistication

By episode six, 'The Missing Heir', the structure of the show is established, and T.C again addresses the camera. It is in this episode that the features of the show become apparent. The episode begins in the usual way with T.C summoning the gang to the alley with a get rich scheme in the works, but in this episode, as the gang are summoned, there are several references to Frank Sinatra and 'The Rat Pack'. The Rat Pack' refers to the group of entertainers led by Frank Sinatra who gathered in Las Vegas in the 1960s (Levy 1999). T.C. sings like Frank Sinatra in this episode, before the rest of the cats join him (he sings again later

[31] Individual episodes of the shows are limited and difficult to obtain. Most episode here were from television re-runs or VHS.

on). On hearing the trashcans which T.C bangs together to alert them, one of the gang remarks that he must attend 'the meeting at the summit', which was the name for the Las Vegas show which the members of the 'Rat Pack' put on. Another member remarks 'girls lots of girls' with character traits reminiscent of Dean Martin. At another point T.C refers to himself having to look after the gang like he is the 'Mother Hen'. This seems to be a reference to Lauren Bacall's position in the early formation of the 'Rat Pack'. The Rat Pack was at a particular high point in 1961 when this episode was produced. I would suggest that rather than Bilko, T.C is modelled on a variety of the members of the Rat Pack together as well as having a slight resemblance to Cary Grant. However as previously stated, the voice actor who played Benny the Ball starred in *The Phil Silvers Show*, which combined with the similarity of the main themes in the shows contribute to the comparison of *Top Cat* to Bilko.[32]

This episode features many of the same features of the anicom identified in *The Flintstones*, such as the use of the sitcom narrative, the comic references to 1960s popular culture and the use of parody. While it does not use the comic device of setting to the same extent as *The Flintstones* it is the comic strategy of anthropomorphism which is the key feature of *Top Cat*. As well as endowing the animals with adult qualities and characters, the show uses these cats to parody popular icons. The use of 'animals as humans as stars' further demonstrates the comedic potential of the anicom and its difference from the live action sitcom, while being able to conform to its generic conventions.

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[32] "...the Bilko-ish Top Cat." (Mallory 1999 p.146)

The show only lasted one season, thirty episodes, though is shown in syndicated re-runs. During this time, William Hanna himself suggested that *Top Cat* was something very different, "Top Cat' was one of the most sophisticated shows we had ever attempted." (Mallory 1999 p.146). Mallory suggests that *Top* Cat was "one of the sharpest, most flavourful animated comedies ever aired." (Ibid.). I believe that it was this ability of the show to push the boundaries of the sitcom in the 1960s through its animated form, as well as its appeal to an adult audience with 'adult' cultural references which made *Top Cat* so 'sophisticated'.

The show's use of the comedic strategies highlighted above demonstrated the versatility of the anicom, within the larger genre of sitcom. Like *The Flintstones*, *Top Cat* conforms to the genre of sitcom with evidence of both generic and cultural verisimilitude. The narrative structure and cultural references not only inform the audience of its generic status, but also reinforces the animated series' inclusion in the genre.

Yogi Bear/ The Yogi Bear Show

The next animated series in the case study is *The Yogi Bear Show.* The series was not broadcast in prime time like its counterparts, and does not initially appear to conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom. The show was included in the case study as I felt at this stage it would be of interest to examine the different forms of comedy the studio was employing in its early years. It allows me to explore some of the features of *The Flintstones* and *Top Cat* that were not appropriated from the live action sitcom but from other comic formats, and animation in general. The show does however have some connections to live action comedy

The Yogi Bear Show began in 1960 following the character's appearance in one of Hanna Barbera's Saturday morning shows. Shown in syndication, *Yogi Bear* employed the format of a variety program popular in the fifties featuring such stars as Milton Berle and Jackie Gleason. Gleason's popular sitcom *The Honeymooners* was a spin off from a variety show sketch, which was converted into a half-hour sitcom format. Yogi Bear was a spin off from variety show *The Huckleberry Hound Show* from the late fifties.[33]

Yogi Bear was given his own variety show, in a similar style to that of Huckleberry Hound, with other short cartoons featuring other characters, but Yogi was the star.[34] The 'sketches' featuring Yogi and Boo-Boo were only five minutes in length, as opposed to the half-hour shows and featured Yogi, his best friend, younger bear Boo Boo and park ranger Ranger Smith, who was always trying to foil Yogi's schemes. The episodes did not conform to the narrative structure of the sitcom as the previous two animated series examined here so far. The episode length is twenty minutes shorter than *The Flintstones* or *Top Cat*, and though the situation of 'Jellystone Park' as the bear's home is the same every week there seems to be no evidence of conformity to the generic conventions of narrative formula as seen in the other shows.

Upon examination of three episodes of *The Yogi Bear Show*, I found that while there is a lack of similarity to the other animated sitcoms produced by Hanna Barbera, or live action sitcoms, the characters do often directly address the 'camera' or audience. There is no canned laughter in this show but the 'actors' acknowledgement of the viewer is similar to that of live action comedy when the

[33] *The Huckleberry Hound Show* aired in syndication in 1958.
[34] Other characters were 'Snagglepuss' and Yakky Doodle'

comedian discusses the gag or pun with the ever-present audience. This suggests conformity to the generic conventions of comedy and the comedic narrative, the narrative as a function for the gags as described by Jenkins (1992). However I would argue that the show does not fall into the category of the sitcom. The location is always the same in every episode of the segments featuring Yogi, however there are no specific examples of cultural, or social, verisimilitude which would be representative of the generic dominant of the sitcom.

The Yogi Bear Show, like *Top Cat*, produced that same year, features anthropomorphised animals as the main characters. The characters interact with humans, as well as the audience, either with canned laughter or direct address to the camera. We see a juxtaposition of the show's 'animatedness' and the comic narrative. Of course this device has been used in animated comedy for some time; however it is more unusual in the sitcom genre. *Yogi Bear* uses this juxtaposition to comic effect in the same way as Bugs Bunny or Daffy Duck would in the Warner Bros. shorts, which further reinforces my assertion that *Yogi Bear* cannot be categorised as an anicom.

The Jetsons

Hanna Barbera's third prime time animated series was *The Jetsons* which premiered on Sunday September 23 1962 at 7.30pm on the ABC network. The situation in *The Jetsons* was a contrast to *The Flintstones*, as it was set in the distant (or not too distant) future, as opposed to the Stone Age era. There were the similar running gags of the household gadgets, but this time they were space age fantasies, with automatic food makers, and dressing rooms, rather than a mammoth for a dishwasher as in *The Flintstones*.

As well as the setting and surroundings, the plots differed from the previous Hanna Barbera animated sitcoms. The humour was mainly derived from misunderstandings and farcical situations in the tradition of the comic narrative and the live action sitcom. The show featured similar sitcom elements to both *Top Cat* and *The Flintstones*, with some emphasis on characterisation, but also often on the 'situation' itself. The setting for the show was the domestic family sitcom. The family consisted of George and Jane Jetson and their children, teenage daughter Judy and a younger son Elroy. Like the Flintstones the Jetsons also had a family pet, but this time it actually was a dog.

The Jetsons originally only aired for one season, but in the 1980s was revived with new shows. However for the purpose of this case study I will only be looking at the episodes made and aired in the 1962-1963 season. There are notable differences in the shows which were made in the 60s and the 80s. The most important being that many of the original cast members are no longer involved, but also the quality of the writing had changed. The show was no longer written for an adult prime-time audience, but for the children's Saturday morning audience. The use of satirical comedy is no longer present and there is no longer canned laughter.

Television and stardom

The original 1960s show focused on similar domestic issues seen in *The Flintstones*, but also included a number of work related problems. Like its predecessor *The Jetsons* plots often included an attempt by one of the main characters to find fame in the music or television industry. The star system in the

US was at its peak in the 1960s and had captured the imagination of television audiences.

One particular episode which examined the nature of stardom, as well as a critique of television is 'Elroy's TV Show'. The episode is a commentary on children's programming of the 1960s, explored in the futuristic world of the show. The situation is set up with 'TV executives' looking for a new kind of program, as they think that there is too much educational programming, people are bored, having learned too much. Their television station has a 'mission to educate' much like the public service ethos of the BBC, or PBS in America. In a reference to the network schedules, the executives conclude that the public needs more TV entertainment, but needs to move away from cowboy and doctor shows. In the episode, Elroy and Astro are 'discovered' and become stars of their own TV show. George's boss Mr Spacely is jealous and wants his own son to star. Most episodes of the show present a conflict between George and his boss, usually consisting of George being fired, but after a series of schemes gets his job back, restoring his career's equilibrium at least. In this episode George and Elroy become disenchanted with stardom and encourage the executives to hire Spacely's son.

This episode is representative of the whole series with the narrative structure conforming to the generic verisimilitude of the sitcom. The show uses canned laughter just as *The Flintstones* and *Top Cat*, enabling the audience to identify the show as a sitcom, again reinforcing the generic verisimilitude. This episode features social and cultural verisimilitude in the form of the commentary on television programming as well as the nature of stardom.

Domestic and workplace (dis)harmony

The issues of domestic and workplace harmony were addressed in the episode, 'Jetsons' Night Out.' George and his boss Mr Spacely become each others alibi's so they can sneak away to a 'robot football' game without their wives knowing. However, their scheme is foiled when their wives see them on television winning the game raffle. The prize of a mink coat is turned into a jacket and stole in an attempt to appease both wives, however they demand more gifts to accessorise. Spacely is angry and fires George. This episode ends with the resolution of the ritual error for the wives and Spacely, but not George, in what becomes a running gag over the course of the series. As with the rest of the episodes, canned laughter is used here to particularly good effect for emphasis of such a farcical scheme. The robot football game is referred to several times as a 'Rock-em sock-em' game, referring to the popular children's toy, 'Rock-em Sock-em Robots', which were also push button controlled. However, it seems that they were released in 1966, while this episode aired in the 1962-1963 season.[35] It is possible that the toy was already conceived but not released until later, or that a different company released the toy before but with less success than the later version. As well as the early reference to the robot toy, the coaches for each team control the entire football game. The controls are similar to the toy, and they foreshadow the video games control consoles used today.

The pursuit of wealth, family and television

In 'Millionaire Astro', the American dream of wealth is combined with the importance of family. Astro, the family dog is found to belong to a 'zillionaire'

[35] Rock-em Sock-em Robots were made by Marx Toys, later under the Mattel name. Released in 1966. http://bigredtoybox.com/cgi-bin/toynfo.pl?rockemsockemindex

and returns to his real owner. However the wealth that this brings Astro cannot make up for missing his 'true' family, the Jetsons. The equilibrium is restored when the zillionaire realises that Astro would be happier with his family than with the wealth. Like the rest of the 1960s seasons of *The Jetsons*, this episode also uses canned laughter. The episode uses the comic device seen in *Top Cat* and *Yogi Bear* where a guard addresses the 'camera' or 'audience', as well as the use of a narrator to link the scenes.

There are several references to television in this episode. George comments, "If this was on TV..." referring to the false reality or fantasy element of television and that he is clearly 'real'. In another scene the zillionaire threatens his lawyer, stating that if he is not successful in his task then he will go back to being on 'TV Night Court' referring to the 1958 series *'Night Court USA'* a series similar to the current *'Judge Judy'* where the court room proceedings take place in front of the television cameras. Another reference occurs when the lawyer character is trying to find his car, he shouts 'calling my car, calling my car' referring to the old radio calls used by the police, 'calling all cars' and often used in police shows of the 1950s and 1960s. In a later scene, George refers to the family's need for a brilliant lawyer suggesting they would need someone like 'Perry Spacon', in an obvious reference to *Perry Mason*, the television series about a successful lawyer which originally ran from 1957 until 1966. These references to television function as reference points which the audience can recognise, in the form of pastiche, rather than parody, what Jameson terms "blank parody" which is "without any of parody's ulterior motives" (1984 p.65). While Jameson suggests that this is the postmodern version of parody, we have previously seen that the terms of postmodernism applied to film and television do

not apply to animation. (Wells 1998a pp.182-86). Having examined the shows I would suggest that 'pastiche' in Jameson's terms is also a common feature of animation, pre-dating postmodernism. The shows feature a combination of pastiche - blank parody and parody.

Animated Sitcom - Characters

Like *The Flintstones* and *Top Cat* before it, *The Jetsons* follows the narrative structure of the live action sitcom. The structure, as well as the domestic situation and stereotypical family character roles demonstrate the shows' conformity to the generic conventions of the sitcom. The use of parody and satirical references to its contemporary popular culture are evidence of the cultural verisimilitude within the series. This use of parody reflects the trend in US television subgenres which have become increasingly aware of their generic conventions. (Caughie 1991 p.147) While this is true of the anicom, and often in the live action sitcom, it is a device which has long been used in animation. (Wells 1998a p.245n, 248n)

Of the Hanna Barbera animated series examined in this case study; three out of four could be classified as anicoms based on the criteria of the narrative structure and conventions of verisimilitude. However there has so far been little discussion of the character types and network scheduling which can further reinforce their status as situation comedies.

Having carried out an initial textual analysis of the show, and familiarising myself with the plots and themes I can now compare the characterisation of the shows. The character types described by Grote (1983) were present in the live

action sitcoms discussed in the previous chapter, and it is useful now to apply that model to the animated series here.

Table 3 features the same character types used to apply to the live action sitcoms, the hero, fool, innocent and scoundrel. These characterisations apply to all of the shows included in the case study. We also see that the average number of characters is five as Grote (1983) described. Though *The Yogi Bear Show* does not conform to the other sitcom conventions it does include the same character types. These character types originated from Propp's analysis of the folktale therefore are common to narrative forms other than the sitcom, in this case narrative comedy.

Top Cat was unusual with a larger number of characters in the show than was common at the time, though there were three main characters which were the focus of most episodes. The show still provided the stereotypical types in a larger ensemble. This practise would occur in live action sitcom in the 1970s with *M*A*S*H* which had eight main characters, though were not all the focus of each episode. This use of ensemble cast, nearly a decade before live action sitcom is another example of the 'sophistication' of the show, which was clearly 'ahead of its time'.

The use of an ensemble 'cast' as in *Top Cat* enables each of the characters to exhibit different characteristics in different episodes. Top Cat is always the hero, however as the table suggests, he can also play the role of scoundrel. Top Cat's criminality, like Bilko before him is always implied in their many attempted 'scams', however the scams generally fail, or uncover a larger scheme by some other character, (not one of the core group).

Show	Date	Character Type				No.Chars.
		Hero	Fool	Innocent	Scoundrel	
The Flintstones[36]	1960	Fred/Wilma	Fred/Barney/Dino	Wilma/Barney/Betty	Fred	5
Top Cat	1961	Top Cat	The Brain/Dibble	Benny, Fancy, Choo Choo	TC/Spook	7
The Yogi Bear Show	1961	Yogi Bear	Ranger Smith	Boo Boo Bear	Yogi Bear	3
The Jetsons	1962	George/Jane	George/Astro	Jane/Judy/Elroy	George	5

Table 3 - Animated comedy after Grote and Propp, 1960-1969

[36] The children in *The Flintstones* are not included in the table as they were introduced later in the series.

This larger scam diminishes the criminal in Top Cat's plan and essentially enables the maintenance of his 'heroic' status. Likewise Officer Dibble is the 'fool' in most episodes, but that role is also 'played' by Brain. The plot of the episode largely dictates the characterisation of each member of the show. This is a common occurrence in the ensemble comedy particularly evident in contemporary live action sitcoms such as *Friends* or *Roseanne* as demonstrated in the previous chapter.

In the shows with smaller character groupings such as, *The Flintstones* and *The Jetsons* the character types are also interchangeable depending on the plot, or situation of the episode. The role of hero can be the head male or female of the 'family' or group, which again reflects the gender politics in the 1960s sitcom. The emergence of the lead male as the fool in these shows is apparent and this progression continues throughout the 1970s and 1980s, which will be examined in later chapters. This role change is part of the genre progression Neale (2000 p.56) described as essential to the survival of genre, particularly with the repetitive nature of television. (Born 1993 p.232)

It is also evident from the table that the hero character of the show is also often the scoundrel. I would argue that this is due to the 'hero' as lead character being the focus of the show. They are more important to the plot than the other characters and essentially, unless they have a specific 'foil' or enemy in an episode, they are the key protagonist and as such become the architect of their schemes as well as the ultimate hero figure. For example Fred Flintstone may orchestrate a plan to get out of work with Barney Rubble as the fool, or comic relief. Fred is a scoundrel for planning this dishonest scheme but is ultimately

the hero of the show. The plans, as ritual error usually fail and with the restoration of status quo we have the return of Fred as hero. However when Wilma is the hero of the episode, Fred is left as the scoundrel at the end as well as the beginning, as discussed in the episode 'Girls Night Out' when the show ends with Fred eating his dinner outside, as he had been at the start.

We can see then that the model identified by Grote does apply to the animated series featured, as well as live-action, which further reinforces their classification in the sitcom genre. The shows also feature a common or average use of the 'domestic' space as the dominant situation in the anicoms of the 1960s. This is also the case with the contemporary live action sitcoms, which the anicom parallel. (This is demonstrated in Appendix A).

Narrative

It is useful to further examine the case study episodes to establish the narrative structure in terms of Marc's formula of equilibrium, and particularly the notion of the 'ritual error' and how that affects the overall themes of the shows. Each episode is broken down into the series of events which Marc outlined as Familiar Status Quo, ritual error made, ritual lesson learned and the return to the familiar status quo. This will demonstrate the extent to which the episode, and series conforms to the generic regime of the sitcom and the nature of the themes which occur in the shows. (the synopses for the episodes are available in Appendix B)

The Flintstones

Examining *The Flintstones*, we can see a commonality in the themes emerging. For example in *Episode 15, 1960-1961 Season – The Girls Night Out* if we apply

Marc's formula we reveal the extent to which the episode follows the sitcom narrative:

Familiar status quo=> (the women against the men, Fred and Barney eat dinner outside, both in the 'doghouse' for not taking the girls out)

The girls complain that they never get taken out anymore, so the boys oblige. They go a fun park, which the girls hate, wanting something more romantic. While there Fred and Barney make a record in a 'new recording booth' (a bird and a blank disc, the bird's beak is the stylus to record the song).

Ritual error made=> In a hurry to get home and make the girls happier, the record gets left behind, 'hilarious consequences' ensue. A group of teenagers find the record and mistake Fred's bad singing for a hip new sound, it is passed on to a record producer who searches for the mystery crooner. Tracked down by a 'Colonel Parker' type, Fred is transformed into 'Hi Fye' and goes on tour. After 2 weeks the girls are fed up with the touring lifestyle, and want to go home.

Ritual lesson learned=> After the third week Wilma starts a rumour about 'Hi Fye' to turn the teens off and Fred's career is over.

Familiar Status Quo=> They all return home to their lives and end as they began. (and the boys eating dinner outside again)

The episode structure conforms to the sitcom narrative and we see that Fred has made the error with Wilma resolving the situation. In *Episode 61, 1961 –1962 Season – 'Dino Goes Hollyrock'* the theme of stardom occurs again. The episode

is centred on Dino and the error and resolution are all his in this unusual episode. However despite the unusual focus, the narrative is the same:

=>Dino greets Fred enthusiastically on his arrival home from work. => Dino abandons the family to seek his fame in 'Hollyrock' (a stone age play on 'Hollywood'). =>Dino finds out that stardom is not what he thought it would be and misses the family. => Dino returns home and again greets Fred enthusiastically upon his arrival home from work.

Episode 65, 1962 –1963 Season – 'The Twitch' is another example of the character's (mostly Fred) obsession with becoming famous. It is also another example of Fred as the one who makes the error, which is ultimately resolved, not by himself, or Wilma, but by the error resolving itself. Rock, the rock star recovers from his allergy and reclaims his role from Fred:

=>While Wilma tries to find an act, Fred sees 'Rock' on television and approaches him to do the show => 'Rock' becomes ill and Fred has to fill in for him, impersonating Rock. => Rock recovers and returns to the stage. => Fred returns to his regular job and life after his brush with fame.

Fred is once again responsible for the error in *Episode 92, 1963 –1964 Season – 'Dino Disappears'*:

=>Dino plays in the house, while Pebbles eats dinner. Fred pays a lot of attention to Pebbles, effectively ignoring Dino =>Fred forgets Dino's anniversary, so Dino runs away. The boys try to find him and end up with the wrong dinosaur. => The boys eventually find Dino and Fred vows to treat him better. =>Dino plays in the house with Pebbles, though now Fred is literally in the 'doghouse'.

These synopses of *The Flintstones* suggest that the 'ritual error' is nearly always made by Fred, and more importantly it is he who learns the ritual lesson, (but forgets it in the next episode). The lesson is generally provided by Wilma, who either bails her husband out of the situation or, helps him find the solution. Barney also plays a large part in the helper role, another character type identified by Propp (1968).

Each of the lessons follows the same theme of the importance of family, and of 'knowing one's place'. Fred longs for the chance of fame but in each instance it fails, either due to him taking a place which is not really his in episode 65, or in the case of episode 15 his relationship with his wife and friends is jeopardised by his fame and he has to give it up (though with a push by Wilma). The importance of place is raised throughout the series and is reminiscent of the role of the 'femme fatal' in the film noir genre, who commonly attain a level of power and dominance throughout the film but are ultimately punished, or returned to their rightful place in the male domain (Kaplan 1998 p.87). The ideological work of the narrative in *The Flintstones* forms a commentary on the contemporary culture of society and ones place in it, and while the text may not offer the same level of subversion, or critique, as Warner Bros. Wells suggests,

> "Their recurrent 'failure'…reinforces a consensual view of domestic order…and 'society' presented as a mechanism which can generate and secure the populist notions of individual achievement, good neighbourliness, community support and institutional success, as long as power remains in the right hands." (2002a p.90)

Wells argues that the visual and verbal gags overwhelm any "situational tensions about class and social aspiration" (p.91) however in my view the show reflected the ideology of 1960s America, the political and social ideals of a perfect

suburban lifestyle, as presented in live action sitcoms. Marc has suggested that the (live action) sitcoms of the 1960s deliberately avoided engaging with controversial issues to the point where the fantasy sitcoms such as *I Dream of Jeanie* and *Bewitched* became 'prolific' (1997 p.107). The generic conformity of *The Flintstones* extended to these themes, but as my case studies have demonstrated, the anicom developed beyond the live action sitcom with the inclusion of other comic features such as parody, slapstick, visual and verbal gags.

Top Cat

The case study episodes of *Top Cat* are examined in the same way as *The Flintstones* and as in the previous show reveal a commonality in the themes of the episodes. In *Episode 1, 1961 –1962 Season – 'Hawaii Here We Come'* the gang are working on a scheme to stow away on a ship to Hawaii. The use of Marc's formula reveals the narrative of the show:

=>The Cats together embarking on a new scheme => Dibble ends up on board and catches the cats. => The gang help Dibble catch the real counterfeiter. => The gang are successful after the scheme.

This is not strictly a return to the familiar status quo or indeed a restoration of the equilibrium of the episode as Marc suggests; it does however resolve the ritual error and conclude the ritual lesson. This is seen again in *Episode 2, 1961 –1962 Season – 'The Maharajah Of Pookajee'*:

=> The gang embark on a scheme to get some jewels. => the gang manage to get past Dibble but end up mistaking the real Maharajah for another impostor. => the

gang lose out in this episode and have not learned their lesson, they think their scheme failed.

As in the previous episode there is not a return to the *familiar status quo*, simply a conclusion to the episode. This is also the case in both *Episode 6, 1961 –1962 Season – 'The Missing Heir'* and *Episode 3, 1961 –1962 Season – 'All That Jazz'*:

=> The gang embarks on a scheme to collect a lot of money. => Chutney is scheming to get rid of Benny. => Dibble saves Benny and the real heir is found. => The gang are once more scheming for money.

=> The gang are together in the alley => 'Jazz' takes over and enters into a contest with TC to try to get the better of him. The cats think the offer from Hollywood is a trick. => They learn the offer is real and TC and the gang take it leaving Jazz behind. => The gang head off to Hollywood.

As in previous episodes, this is not a restoration of the equilibrium as the cats' situation has changed, but the 'situation' of the episode has been resolved, Jazz has lost the competition.

The ritual error in *Top Cat* is usually the 'case of mistaken identity'. In each episode a plan is executed with either deliberate intention to fool someone regarding identity, or where the gang is 'unintentionally' mistaken. The lesson then is either one where Dibble learns of the mistake and acts accordingly as in episode 1. In episode 6 the gang realise discover that Benny's identity is not what they thought, but rather than keep up the pretence, and keep the money, they choose to return to their regular life and foil the 'crook' in the episode

whose plan was worse than Top Cat's. This is another example of Top Cat's criminality depicted as less serious than that of 'real' crooks. The gang are never truly criminal and as such usually triumph in the end, though they may not achieve the intended wealth, they are never punished for their schemes beyond losing the 'loot'. There is the distinction made between 'enterprise' and organised crime, with the gang opting for the former.

Yogi Bear

In this series there is a 'situation' or 'event' which is resolved, but as in *Top Cat*, this resolution varies between Yogi essentially 'winning' and sometimes losing out to Ranger Smith. Todorov's fundamental theories of narrative are not limited to the sitcom, but can be applied to the comic narrative in general. As such I do not feel it is necessary to repeat the application of Marc's formula to this series, as I have previously established that this show does not fully conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom. The main themes of the episode are of Yogi's attempts to steal picnic baskets, which like Top Cat's schemes are never presented as particularly serious crimes, despite the constant watchful eye of Ranger Smith. Most of the episodes consisted of a combination of slapstick and 'one-liner' gags which was ideally suited for the shorter episode lengths.

The Jetsons

This show was essentially another domestic sitcom like *The Flintstones* but with a 'space age' setting. The narrative structure in the series conforms to the sitcom conventions, though occasionally, as in *Top Cat* the show was not concluded with an exact restoration of the equilibrium, rather a conclusion to the 'situation'

that had arisen. As in the previous anicoms Marc's formula is applied to test the narrative structure.

In *Episode 9 1962-1963 Season – 'Elroy's TV Show'* we see George and Elroy both involved in the event, but it is George's constant interference which provides the error:

=> Elroy playing with Astro. => The pair is hired to star in a new television series and George keeps interfering with the process. => they become disenchanted with the whole thing and quit. => The family returns to normal.

Episode 15 1962-1963 Season – 'Millionaire Astro' features the theme of family and its importance, common in the domestic sitcom:

=>Astro with the family => After discovering his true identity, Astro is taken away from the family, but is miserable with his new owner. => Astro's new owner realises how unhappy he is and decides to return him to the Jetson family. => the family is re-united.

The last episode in the case study, *Episode 5 1962-1963 Season – 'Jetson's Night Out'* is unusual as it begins with George and his boss Spacely scheming together to fool their wives, and as such is not the familiar status quo as in the rest of the series. However the ritual error made is when the pair are caught by their wives. The ritual lesson learned occurs when they try to make up for their behaviour by giving the wives gifts, but in the end Spacely is mad at George and fires him. This is clearly not a restoration of the equilibrium, however in the next episode the familiar status quo will have been restored.

The errors and lessons in *The Jetsons* are very similar to *The Flintstones* with the main theme of the importance of family. This is typical of the domestic sitcom where the family is the core group of characters, as opposed to the workplace setting of *Top Cat* where the 'scheme' or 'job' is at the centre of the episode.

I would suggest that while Marc's formula is useful and indeed applicable to most of these sitcoms, or in this case, anicoms, it is not always a 'ritual error' which occurs in the episode but rather an event which occurs, particularly in the case of *Top Cat*.

Of the four Hanna Barbera series discussed here, three were broadcast by a major network and scheduled in prime time. *The Yogi Bear Show* was the only animated series which was originally shown in syndication, and the case study analysis suggests that the series does not conform to the conventions of the sitcom. As discussed in the previous chapter, the scheduling of shows can affect the audiences' perception of the show as well as inform the generic discourse of the industry. The success of *The Flintstones*, as well as the later HB animated sitcoms, signalled a new form of animation with a new audience. The shows were written with both children and adults in mind, and as such resulted in a new type of programming, the animated situation comedy series. The scheduling, as well as the sitcom structure, enabled the shows to be accepted as an adult comedy format, in the medium of animation which had previously been marketed, and largely perceived, as a children's form.

The style of comedy in each of the shows, with intertextual references and parody was a departure from the gag driven narrative comedy commonly employed in animated cartoons. The domestic sitcoms dealt with familial, and

workplace, issues which paralleled the live action comedy of the decade, however the settings of the stone age and space age provided the viewer with element of fantasy which Marc (1997) suggested was prevalent in a decade with so much political upheaval. The main themes of the shows centred on the notion of the 'American Dream' finding fortune, and often fame. The public's continuing fascination with Hollywood allowed the shows to include guest 'stars', such as actress Ann Margaret and actor Tony Curtis, as previously discussed both featured in *The Flintstones*.

These inclusions of celebrity added to the appeal with the audience and provided the Hanna Barbera anicoms with great success and 'consumer' perceived 'value'. The shows changed the form of the animated narrative comedy which altered the perception of animation, becoming acceptable among audiences. However this would be short lived as *The Jetsons* only survived one season before it was relegated to syndication. Despite the studio's success with *The Flintstones,* which lasted six seasons in prime time, it became clear to William Hanna and Joe Barbera that "...adult television viewers may not have been ready to receive a greater influx of nighttime animation shows." (p.133) The studio continued to produce animated comedy series though these were made for the Saturday morning children's market. There was one exception, Johnny Quest, which though was scheduled in prime time, was an adventure series rather than a comedy, as such it has not been included in this case study.

Despite the initial success of the shows, their acceptance by the audience and institutional classification as animated sitcom through the scheduling of the shows, the success was short lived. *The Jetsons* was cancelled after one season,

and rerun in syndication. *Top Cat* similarly only aired for one season and again shown in syndicated re-runs. The show which was the most successful was the original anicom, *The Flintstones*. The show lasted six years before it was cancelled and relegated to re-run status. Though the shows 'lived' on in re-run, usually as part of the Saturday morning children's cartoon line up, the prime time anicom had essentially disappeared. Television was changing and the audiences' expectations were changing with it. The development of the genre throughout the preceding decade will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 - Case Study - 1970s

The 1960s saw the introduction of the prime time animated series on network television, however by 1966 all three of the anicoms produced by the Hanna Barbera studio, as discussed in the previous chapter, had been withdrawn from prime time to be aired in syndication (sold on to independent stations for broadcast) on Saturday mornings. The studio ventured into the animated sitcom genre again in the 1970s, this time taking a slightly different approach than they had previously, producing the show for an adult audience, rather than a mixture of adults and children as they had with their 1960s anicoms.

This chapter examines the studio's animated series from the 1970s, concentrating on the case studies of three shows, *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home, Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* and *Hong Kong Phooey*. Individual episodes from these series will be subject to textual analysis (as in the previous chapter) to determine their generic status in terms of the sitcom and anicom.

The chapter begins by examining *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*, Hanna Barbera's only prime time animated sitcom since *The Flintstones* ended in 1966 and the only animated sitcom broadcast in prime time in the 1970s. This show would also be the last anicom in prime time until 1989. The other two shows in the case study were not broadcast in prime time, however I will argue that the results of the textual analysis of the shows demonstrates their generic status as anicoms, despite their being broadcast alongside children's television. As the literature review demonstrated, the scheduling of shows is vital to their perception by the audience, which in turn, is important in the categorisation of genre.

The chapter will also consider the apparent decline in the popularity and production of the anicom during the 1970s, which would continue into the 1980s, as well as potential reasons for this decline.

Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home

The first animated series in this case study is the 1972 Hanna Barbera series *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home.* The show was broadcast in syndication, rather than on a major network as its predecessors had. The series aired from 1972 until 1974 with a total of forty eight episodes, however there is a lack of information on this show, (academic or from within the industry).

As well as producing their own animated television series, William Hanna and Joseph Barbera had been writers, and producers on a live action comedy anthology series called *Love, American Style* (1969-74). This series featured a number of short 'sketches' on the subject of relationships, "titillated with contemporary sexual situations (while always upholding traditional mores)" (Jones 1992 p.189). One particular segment entitled, 'Love and the Old Fashioned Father' was an animated segment, produced and written by Hanna and Barbera. The segment starred Tom Bosley as 'Harry Boyle' in a section described as, "An old fashioned father is caught between the hip generation and a reactionary neighbour."[37] This segment was then 'spun off' into the prime time animated series *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home,* featuring the same characters and star.

Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home was Hanna Barbera's first venture into the prime time animated sitcom since *The Jetsons* and while its anicom predecessors

[37] Information from website www.tvtome.com

were created for both adults and children, *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* was created primarily for an adult audience. Following the success of the 'pilot' within a live action show, the studio looked to contemporary examples of live action sitcom which could provide examples of popular subjects and styles. They were undoubtedly influenced by the hit show *All in the Family* (1971 - 79)[38].

All in the Family was a hit despite its fairly controversial political content. The show was an Americanized version of the British sitcom '*Till Death do us Part* (1965-75) developed for the US by Norman Lear. Lear had attempted to produce the show earlier, in 1968, but the ABC network turned it down (Jones 1992 p.186) due to its controversial, political humour. However this changed in 1971 when CBS decided it wanted something "gutsier" (p.204). Both shows were centred around a family featuring a husband, wife and daughter, who has married and lives in the family home with her spouse. The father in both shows was a particularly bigoted character, a racist and sexist caricature set in his ways and frequently battling with the younger, more liberal, members of the household. The wife in both shows generally tried to deflect, or resolve, the conflict, however was also occasionally allied to the children. The American adaptation was a "reimagined" version of the British show (Marc 1997 p.147), adapted to meet the US mass market. *All in the Family* recreated some of the same storylines of its British counterpart but transferred it into "middle American allegory" (Ibid.), which the audiences could recognise and engage with.

[38] *All in the Family* aired from 1971 to 1979 on the CBS network.

Just as *All in the Family* was adapted to better suit the American audiences so too was *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home.* The anicom followed the structure of the domestic family sitcom with the father as central character, surrounded by loving wife and three children, of varying ages like its live action counterparts.

In *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* the head of the household, Harry Boyle is a stereotypical sitcom father, in the tradition of the live action sitcoms of the 1950s and early 1960s, a fairly conservative and hard working man (white collar, owns a small business), always trying to do the best to provide for his family and provide guidance. Harry lives with wife Irma who at the same time tolerates and attempts to diffuse disputes between her husband and children. Irma is a traditional sitcom wife, playing the role of moral centre of the household. She supports her husband when he needs her but is also able to be an ally to the children. Eldest son Chet, a college drop out is unemployed and currently 'sponging' (to use his father's phrase), from his family. He possesses liberal ideals carried over from the 1960s hippie subculture, which his father never seems to agree with providing the comedy with generation gap humour. Chet's main ally is his sister Alice who is a keen liberal and sometime feminist. Harry's greatest ally is youngest son Jamie who seems to be optimistic about his future as a capitalist.

Like *All in the Family,* many of the episodes focused on political topics such as abortion, environmental issues, communism, and state welfare, but in this case, though Harry is fairly conservative, he is not the right wing bigot his live action counterpart Archie Bunker was portrayed to be. This was the job of neighbour Ralph who characterises the extremes of the fear and paranoia in America in the

early 1970s. He believes that communists are around every corner coming to destroy his freedom (a character which will be developed further in the 1990s anicom *King of the Hill* (1997-)). It is Ralph who usually provides much of the comedy with crazy schemes which are supposed to help Harry but usually go wrong in a rather slapstick manner often providing the 'ritual error' in the episode.

The animation of *Wait 'till Your Father Gets Home* displays a different aesthetic from the studio's earlier shows and is less cartoonish than the animation in *The Flintstones* or *Top Cat*. The limited animation technique (adopted by Hanna Barbera in the 1960s), is used here with even less background than the previous shows. The subtle colours and more realistic, or representative, style of drawing enabled the comedy itself to dominate with the dialogue becoming central as opposed to the numerous visual gags and slapstick in the previous anicoms. The change in animation style may have been as a result of new animators and directors, as the studio was rapidly expanding employee numbers as well as beginning to outsource its production to other studios, including to companies overseas (Hanna 1996 pp.193-206). Unfortunately there is very little information on the studio in the 1970s; however in 1967, after several offers, Hanna Barbera agreed to sell the studio to Taft Broadcasting, with Joe Barbera and William Hanna running the studio and maintaining the name. This information is limited to Hanna's autobiography with little detail on Taft Broadcasting itself or what transpired in the studio as a result, though the naming

of both Bill and Joe on the board of the company suggests they maintained a level of control. [39]

The first episode in the case study is entitled 'The Hippie', and introduces and sets up many of the relationships between the family and the surrounding neighbourhood. After allowing Chet's hippie friend Claude to stay, and subsequently over stay his welcome, Harry tries to beat him at his own game by pretending to adopt the hippie lifestyle. The neighbours, particularly Ralph are not impressed by Claude's presence and begin protesting by declaring war on Claude's liberal ideals. As the neighbourhood war escalates, a television company arrives. Impressed by Claude's musical abilities, the television company offers him a lucrative deal, and he sells out revealing his true capitalist ideals, much to the disappointment of Chet. However the family returns to normal and the neighbourhood dispute is over, thus following the live action sitcom structure with a conclusion of restored equilibrium.

Next door neighbour Ralph's paranoia is established in this episode when he hears the folks songs sung by Claude and suggests that they are, "Anti-American songs about peace and freedom". As a result Ralph builds a wall between the neighbouring properties to protect himself and his army of friends, who are equally paranoid. The character is parodying the nature of post Vietnam and post McCarthy paranoia in 1970s America (Marc 1997 p.157-58; Jones 1992 p.239), and it features quite prominently in all of the episodes reviewed, but is also very close in character and theme to Archie Bunker, the father in *All in the Family*. The themes of this episode comment on the 1960s peace movement with the

[39] "The Hanna Barbera Exposure Sheet" newsletter from 1967 – from the official Cartoon Network website. http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/watch/studio/hbtour/media/exposuresheet.pdf

opposition from Ralph who believes that any liberal viewpoint is communist and must be stopped.

Ralph's paranoia is highlighted again in the next episode, 'The Beach Vacation', though here as a shorter sub plot. In this episode Harry has taken his family on holiday to get away from the bustle of work. He complains that he will still need to go to work to afford the luxury of a vacation, while trying to get to sleep in a broken bed. Harry's frequent complaints about having to try hard to provide for his family are social commentary on the economy of the 1970s. The generational conflict, common in sitcom (Grote 1983) occurs again in this episode when it is discovered that teenage nudists have taken up residency on the beach by the family cottage, much to Harry and Irma's disgust. The children as usual object to their parents complaints with protests about human rights. Ralph sees this nudism as a 'commie plot to undress America' and gathers his 'troops', fellow paranoid neighbours who always follow Ralph's schemes, to try to stop them.

After chatting to the 'nudist' boy's father, Harry decides that he might actually be a decent kid and drops the charges he had filed. Meanwhile it is youngest son Jamie who solves the problem by telling the nudist off for ruining his chances of setting up business and charging his friends to use the cottage facilities. Ashamed of getting in the way of enterprise, the nudist decides to leave the beach. The problem is resolved and the family enjoys the rest of their vacation.

This episode features the kind of self reflective commentary on television that is a hallmark of later anicoms such as *The Simpsons,* when Harry asks his youngest son Jamie, "who needs to watch all those cartoons on Saturday mornings? "Why do you look at them anyway?" Jamie replies, "I'm trying to see how they're

going to make it work, now they can't use any violence." referring to the changes in television regulation and increased pressure from parent groups to limit the violence on television. The previous chapter highlighted the incident with the 1970s television executive who refused to air *Tom and Jerry* and claimed that it was too violent for television at that time.

The increasing pressure on television networks from external groups, parental and religious, was beginning to have an effect on the content of the shows broadcast, and indeed whether the shows were actually broadcast. The parents activist group Action for Children's Television, ACT had been founded in 1968 and in 1970 had petitioned the Federal Communications Commission, FCC, to require television stations to provide a certain amount of television for children. This type of activism was becoming commonplace throughout the 1970s and continued into the 1980s and will be discussed further in the next chapter.

The show uses established comedy devices such as the direct address to the audience as discussed in the previous chapter. Like preceding Hanna Barbera characters, Top Cat and Yogi Bear, Harry often addresses the camera directly. The show also uses laughter tracks and follows the sitcom half hour format. The show conformed to all of the generic conventions of the live action sitcom such as narrative structure and character as well as exhibiting social and cultural verisimilitude in the social and cultural references which the audiences could engage with. The characterisation will be discussed further later in the chapter.

The role of Harry was voiced by actor Tom Bosley, who would go on to star as the father in the nostalgia live action sitcom *Happy Days* (1974-84). This use of an actor, which audiences will already be familiar with (from frequent guest roles

in television series, as well as roles in *The Debbie Reynolds Show* (1969) and *Marcus Welby MD* (1969)) in live action is unusual in Hanna Barbera shows. They frequently used the same voice actors in their shows, which became something of a characteristic of the studio. For example the names Don Messick and Daws Butler became synonymous with Hanna Barbera animation (anicoms as well as animated comedies) each providing literally hundreds of voices for Hanna Barbera characters. I would suggest that the use of an established live action actor adds to the generic realism to the show. The audiences' familiarity with the actor facilitates their acceptance of the show as a sitcom. *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*, like *The Flintstones* often featured guest stars, popular comics of the time such as Phyliss Diller and Don Knotts. This device would be used again in 1989 in *The Simpsons*.

The theme of the 'free spirit' returns in episode 6, 'Love Story' but instead of nudists as in the previous episode, it is the ideals of a young man who prefers begging to working for a living. Taking its title from the 1970 tragic romance movie, Alice falls in love with a charming young man who Harry believes is going to college, but turns out to be a beggar. Harry of course does not approve, just as the father in the movie, and constantly preaches the importance of college. At the start of the episode Alice is trying to convince Harry to buy a Chinese style jacket, he suggests that there is nothing wrong with American jackets. He also suggests that her generation have no work ethic but want everything for nothing, "This generation has come up with three words, 'Love, Peace and Gimme'."

The ideological conflict between the pair intensifies when Ralph finds out about the begging and wants Harry to put a stop to the relationship. Alice imagines Norman as her knight in shining armour in the first of many fantasy sequences in this episode as she is intrigued by the romantic notion of complete freedom from the restraints of a career or responsibility. Alice protests that her family should accept Norman and the pair decide to get engaged. Upon hearing this announcement, Harry contacts Norman's parents, who turn out to be extremely wealthy. Harry now approves of the relationship, but Alice decides that Norman is not right for her now that she knows he really has money and was only begging to rebel against his parents, rather than an idealist free spirit. Alice is single once more and the equilibrium of the episode is restored, however the ideological conflict between Alice and her father is now reversed. Alice originally likes Norman's free spirit ideals and protests her father's disapproval, however when he does approve she is still unhappy. She loses interest in Norman's rebellion against his parents, preferring the romantic notion of him as a poor free spirit.

The ideological conflict between the generations is also the subject of episode 12, 'Expectant Papa' which focuses more on Irma. After experiencing dizzy spells and odd cravings, Irma thinks she is pregnant and she and Harry are delighted. However they are met with mixed feelings from friends and family. The kids think it would be a further drain on an already over crowded world, Harry's co-workers think he is too old and that he will be unable to participate fully in the child's life. Though Harry is excited about the prospect of another baby, his accountant suggests that 'as an investment you can't afford it' and 'it's not a good idea'. However these responses are odd for 1971 as at that time

America was still very cautious about the subject of abortion particularly on television and Irma could not have done anything about the pregnancy. The case of 'Roe Vs Wade' where women were legally given the right to abortion was in 1973 so it still would have been illegal when this episode was made. The whole situation has also meant that their planned trip to Europe will have to be postponed. Eventually the kids come round to the idea, just as Irma finds out that it was a false alarm, and everything goes back to normal and the equilibrium is restored.

The false alarm is used as a device to avoid the situation that would have been too controversial for the anicom to deal with; instead the problem is resolved at the level of narrative. The *All in the Family* spin off *Maude* (1972-78) dealt with the situation in a 1972 episode entitled 'Maude's Dilemma' in which the title character decided to have an abortion and in doing so was the first character on television to have an abortion. The two part episode was so controversial that some CBS affiliates refused to broadcast it (Marc 1997 p.152). The refusal by a network to broadcast a high rated live action show suggests that the same abortion outcome in *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* would never have been broadcast either, perhaps then it was not worth the risk to deal with the situation in the same way.

We see in this episode that Harry generally tolerates Ralph's politics, humouring him. However it is in an obviously sarcastic way, suggesting that he doesn't agree with Ralph's ideas. While the episode focuses on the pregnancy, Harry and Irma are shown in their bedroom sleeping in twin beds, which though common at the time removes any explicit suggestions of their sexual relationship,

despite the adult audience and political content of the show. While this attitude had been common in the live action sitcom of the 1960s, where any suggestion of sex was heavily laden with innuendo and generally the 'punchline' of the gag. The boundary pushing shows produced (and influenced) by Norman Lear took these topics further, to the point when in the mid 1970s when the networks were pressured into instituting "Family Viewing Hour Practises, under which every show aired from 8:00 to 9:00P.M. would fit standards of languages and subject matter..." (Jones 1992 p.234). Lear was forced to reschedule *All in the Family* in a later timeslot to keep the networks happy, no such risk would be taken with the anicom, which by the time 'Family Viewing Hour' was implemented (1976) was long off the air.

The issues raised by *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* were never quite as controversial as those addressed in the live action *All in the Family* which lasted eight years and spawned a number of spin off shows.[40] The issues, as seen above, tended to be brushed aside as accidents or misunderstandings and Harry, and even Ralph were never as outwardly hostile, nasty or offensive to people as Archie Bunker. *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* was not as successful as its live action counterpart with the show only lasting two seasons. Unlike the earlier Hanna Barbera shows it never aired on the big networks and syndication rarely attracts the level of viewers that the networks attract. The show was developed like *The Flintstones* by looking at the successful live action sitcom for examples of themes, content and format. However where the stone age anicom developed the format for an audience of both children and adults, *Wait 'Till Your Father*

[40] Spin offs from the show: *Maude* (1972-78), *Archie Bunker's Place* (1979-83), *The Jeffersons* (1975-85) There were also spin offs from these spin offs, including *Good Times* (1974-79) and *Gloria* (1982-83).

Gets Home was aimed specifically at adults and as such was never moved to the Saturday morning schedules when its night time run finished.

It is interesting that while the show was the first obviously political anicom, produced for an adult audience, the show has failed to reappear in constant re-run like the 1960s Hanna Barbera anicoms. The show does not seem to have the appeal of *The Flintstones* or *The Jetsons* which featured more observational comedy, more subtle in their social commentary, however there is a distinct difference between *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* and its 1960s counterparts in terms of their engagement with topical issues. *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* has a far more political edge than *The Flintstones* or *The Jetsons* which offered little in the way of a critique of consumer culture and were located outside of a contemporary setting.

The decline in the audience for the 1960s anicoms, with most of the shows re-scheduled on Saturday mornings, suggested that either the adult audience no longer engaged with the anicom as they once had or that the networks had lost interest in supporting shows which they still essentially viewed as children's entertainment (despite the content). I would propose that the success of the Hanna Barbera anicoms was in part due to their use of the medium of animation as a way to create visual humour unseen, and difficult to produce, in live action sitcom, and the presence of other comedy features such as slapstick and parody, resulting in something different from the traditional live action sitcom. Whereas *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* was essentially viewed as an animated version of *All in the Family*, but with milder comedy. I would argue then that with the

already successful live action show, the audience did not want to watch a less daring version of the same thing.

The earlier anicoms had presented something different to the audience from the usual live action sitcoms, but here the show was the same with nothing to mark out its difference from the rest of the shows, or develop the progression of the genre, anicom or live action. The animation was secondary to the comedy dialogue and might as well have been presented in live action. This view is supported by Hal Erickson who, while recognising its success, suggested that it was merely an animated version of something which already existed in live action, it "...revived a format that had flourished briefly in the early 1960s: the adult oriented, half-hour animated cartoon. As the first effort in years..[it] was embraced by viewers...nothing more than a HB version of All in the Family...' (Erickson 1989, p.217) Erickson also noted that car dealer Cal Worthington sued the show, when he was caricatured on the show (p.218). Though not documented elsewhere, (there is very little literature on the show at all), this would have had an effect on the production of the show, at least in terms of the content. As previously suggested there was the influence of external bodies on the content of the shows that would undoubtedly affect the content and therefore the type of shows being produced. This could ultimately lead to a decline in the genre and will be discussed further in the next chapter. Despite the show's apparent failure in comparison to its contemporaries, both live action and anicom, *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* was a groundbreaking anicom in terms of its social and political commentary, something which would not be seen again for nearly twenty years.

Though *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* was the only prime time anicom in produced in the 1970s specifically for an adult audience, there were two other shows which I have included for examination, both of which were broadcast in children's viewing slots. However I would argue that both possess generic characteristics of the sitcom and are therefore included in this case study.

Help, It's The Hair Bear Bunch

The next series in the case study is *Help, It's the Hair Bear Bunch* which aired in 1971. The show was not scheduled in prime time like its predecessors, however I would suggest that the format and content of the show present some conformity to the sitcom genre. The show was broadcast in a Saturday morning slot on the CBS network but was cancelled after only one season.

The show follows the adventures of three bears living in the 'Wonderland Zoo', who strive for an easier life, despite the mean zookeeper's attempts to get the animals to work for him. The animals form co-operative plans for temporary escapes to enjoy what the world outside the zoo has to offer. Like many other HB cartoons of the time, it features talking animals interacting with humans. Lead bear 'Hair' shares some characteristics of the clever and scheming Top Cat, from the 1960s anicom of the same name.

The show shares many of the characteristics of the other anicoms featured, including the format and narrative structure. Though largely compared to *Yogi Bear* due to the main characters being bears, the show also bears a resemblance to live action sitcom *Hogan's Heroes*, which aired from 1965 until 1971 (also on CBS) when *Hair Bear Bunch* began. Though the live action show was set in a POW camp in Germany in the Second World War, and the Hair Bear Bunch is

set in a zoo, in the present, they share the themes of escape, with the aid of gadgets and tricks which are hidden from the bumbling wardens or in this case, zoo keepers. The main characters Hair Bear and his live action counterpart Hogan also share an ability to manipulate most situations to his advantage. However unlike its anicom predecessors the show does not use canned laughter, which can reinforce the generic realism.

The show follows the format of the live action sitcom, and shares themes with live action sitcom *Hogan's Heroes* but it does not feature the same amount of social commentary that the other shows have featured. The other anicoms were produced with an adult audience in mind and thus contained slightly more sophisticated humour. It seems that by this time, the shows still used the narrative of the sitcom as it was the prevalent comedy format of the day, the variety show format as seen in *The Yogi Bear Show* was growing stale (until Rowan and Martin 1968-1973) but the comedy had returned to a more slapstick 'gag' oriented format.

This would suggest a return, by the Hanna Barbera studio to concentrate their production on children's comedy shows of the type that they had produced when the studio began in the late 1950s.[41] Their early series such as The *Huckleberry Hound Show* (1958) and *Quick Draw McGraw* (1959) used a variety format with shorter animations and a variety of different characters. These 'shorts' took the format in the larger show as sketches, which did not require any commonality between them. This format would be seen again later in the 1970s and throughout the 1980s.

[41] The studio opened in 1957 following the closure of MGM.

The structure and format of the show is exemplified by episode three 'Raffle Ruckus.' In an attempt to make life at the zoo better, and to thwart the plans of the mean head zookeeper Mr Peevly and his bumbling assistant Botch, Hair Bear and his friends Square Bear and Bubi Bear organise, and rig a raffle to guarantee that they win the grand prize of the zoo. The 'familiar status quo' in this episode is Peevly making the bears clean the zoo, the ritual error occurs when Hair wins the zoo and has to take over the running of it. However Hair discovers that running the zoo is not that easy and relents to Peevly resolving the ritual error and restoring the equilibrium of the zoo, and the episode. The only difference being that Hair ensures the bears are given some concessions by essentially blackmailing Peevly. By making Peevly look good in front of the zoo Superintendent, he rewards the animals, at least for the rest of this episode. At the start of the next episode, the familiar status quo of Peevly treating the animals badly will have been restored. The involvement of the Superintendent is a frequent occurrence and resembles the General from *Hogan's Heroes*. Hogan usually managed to use the General's visits to his advantage and win over prison commander Colonel Klink (who plays the same role as Peevly). In this episode we see the secret underground tunnels the animals use to get around the zoo unseen, and often outside which is also reminiscent of *Hogan's Heroes.*

This format is repeated throughout the series. In 'Gobs of Gobaloons' the bears discover a treasure map, which Peevly wants. The bears outsmart Peevly as usual, but in this episode neither the bears, nor Peevly win the treasure as it turns out to belong to a European country. The bears have not outsmarted Peevly, however the equilibrium of the episode and the characters situation is restored.

In both 'The Bear who Came to Dinner' and 'The Diet Caper' the bears run scams to trick the keepers. In these episodes the bears infiltrate Peevly's house in an attempt to eat his food and use his home to hold parties for the rest of the animals. However in the former the bears use the threat of litigation to manipulate Peevly and in the latter they escape punishment for being in the house by pretending they are throwing a party for Botch, who can't remember if it is his birthday or not. They both follow the narrative structure of the sitcom, with the restoration of equilibrium, however they do not include the same amount of cultural and social verisimilitude as the 1960s anicoms. There are the similarities to *Hogan's Heroes* and references to the movie *The Great Escape* throughout the series as well as the bears' (Hair in particular) following the 'latest' 1970s fashions. Despite the similarities to the live action sitcom and the use of the sitcom narrative structure the show does not conform fully to all of the conventions of the genre. I have already established the importance of scheduling and the acceptance of the audience to the classification of the genre in previous chapters. The show would therefore not be classed as a prime time animated series by institutional genre in the same way as *The Flintstones,* however upon further examination of the content of the show, including the characterisation which will be discussed further in this chapter, I would suggest that the show could be considered to be an anicom.

Hong Kong Phooey

The final animated series in the case study is *Hong Kong Phooey* a show which while very popular at the time of broadcast, has become a cult favourite with those who grew up with the series. The show ran from 1974 until 1976 on the ABC Network, though with only 16 episodes, the show then moved to the NBC

network where it was broadcast until 1981.[42] The series is still re-run in syndication and on cable demonstrating its lasting popularity. It was due to the shows' continuing popularity, as well as that of *Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* that I was able to record a number of episodes for analysis. The shows were re-run on the cable channel Cartoon Network, in the UK, suggesting that the shows are still popular, in both the US and in the UK.

The series in the super hero genre tradition, featured a super hero who was a 'mild mannered' janitor in a police station, but this was a cover for his secret identity as 'Hong Kong Phooey' the super Kung Fu expert and crime fighter. Phooey was voiced by veteran character actor Scatman Crothers who also sang the theme song which claimed that Hong Kong Phooey was a 'Number 1 super guy!' Penry the janitor was well placed in the station to overhear calls for help from the public. He then changed to his alter ego with the aid of his sidekick, 'Spot'. In the tradition of Hanna Barbera, Penry/Phooey was actually a talking dog and Spot a cat, however no one seemed to mind. The 'gag' is that Phooey is not a very good super hero, he refers to his 'Hong Kong Book of Kung Fu' for the right moves to defeat the villains. However he is clumsy and it is usually Spot who saves the day by intervening, (though Phooey always thinks he did it himself).

Each episode begins with the opening credits and theme song, during which Penry transforms into Hong Kong Phooey, by using his special secret exit from the police station, and getting into his 'costume'. Just as Superman used a phone booth to change from Clark Kent into his superhero alter ego, Penry uses a filing

[42] Information provided by www.yesterdayland.com

cabinet, which he leaps into, and then jumps out as Hong Kong Phooey. Of course a gag is included in this intro when Penry gets stuck inside the cabinet and Spot has to help him get out.

The episodes used a slightly different format from the sitcom half hour or even the animated short of seven minutes. Each episode would feature two stories, or crooks, but would be linked by a general theme in the whole episode. For example, an activity or event internal to the police station where Penry/Phooey was based would feature in both parts of the story, even though the criminal to be caught was entirely separate. This can be seen in each of the episodes featured in the case study. Like its counterpart, *Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* the show does not use canned laughter. However it is not presented as an anicom in the same way as its predecessors, therefore without the prime-time adult nature of the show (and the inclusion of animals as the main characters) there is no need to add the same level of realism, to encourage the audience to participate in the 'larger audience' described by Grote (1983 p.66).

The first episode of the series, 'Car Thieves/ Zoo Story' sets up the entire theme of the series and introduces the characters fully. We see how Penry changes from his secret identity as the janitor to becoming the famous super hero 'Hong Kong Phooey' (HKP) in some detail in this episode, which in later episodes is shown less as it has already been established. The relationship between the main characters is also established, as well as their knowledge of HKP. 'Car Thieves' begins, as all of the episodes do with the crime taking place and the criminal's plan being described. In this case, as the title suggests car thieves are stealing cars throughout the city. The next scene is in the police station where Rosemary

the control room operator is answering a call about a theft. At this point Penry over hears and dashes off to become HKP. Eventually, after a series of coincidences, HKP foils the crooks and saves the day.

We see that it is usually not actually HKP that catches the crooks but usually by some chain of slapstick events which lead to the capture of the crooks, or by the intervention of the police cat Spot. Spot is essentially HKP's sidekick, and is very clever, but unlike HKP being a talking dog, Spot can't talk, behaving essentially like a cat, rather than a humanised animal like Phooey. There is also often the inclusion of some kind of message, aimed at kids, in this episode HKP is seen putting on his seatbelt in the car as well as addressing the camera and telling the audience that they 'should always wear a helmet when riding a cycle.'

The second half of the episode 'Zoo Story' involves a series of kangaroos being stolen from the zoo, which turns out to be the hiding place of a rare diamond which the crooks stole and stashed away. The only problem being they couldn't remember which kangaroo, so they stole them all until they got the right one. HKP eventually catches up with them and again saves the day. The equilibrium of the episode is restored when Phooey saves the day, the crooks are delivered to the police station and Penry returns and ruins something of the Sergeant Flint's (usually spills, or breaks something). The episode ends with the Sergeant angry at Penry and no-one discovering his secret.

The pattern of events in 'TV or Not TV/ Stop Horsing Around' is the same as described above. Some crooks are stealing all of the televisions in the city, including the Police station's. Hong Kong Phooey hides inside a set in a closed television store so he can be stolen and taken to the crooks hideout. Once inside

he can foil their plans, which of course succeed with the aid of Spot rather than Phooey. In the second section, prize racehorses are being stolen right from the track and Phooey decides to ride one in a race to follow the trail. It eventually leads to the circus where the clowns have been stealing the horses and disguising them with paint to use in their show. Phooey dresses up as a clown to infiltrate the gang. He foils the plan when he spills water on the horses and the paint comes off, revealing their true identity.

This 'accidental' spilling of the water to save the day is representative of the way Phooey manages to foil the crooks, if Spot does not directly intervene, it is usually by a fortunate accident that the crooks end up losing out. This use of slapstick is the main source of comedy in the series, particularly when Phooey's plan goes wrong, but ultimately foils the crook anyway. However the other key 'gag' in the show is the reference to the superhero genre's use of the secret identity, particularly 'Superman'. Telephone operator Rosemary often comments on how 'dreamy' Hong Kong Phooey is, never realising that he is Penry, her co-worker. A change of outfit, and small eye mask changes Penry so completely that no one in the Police station guess Penry's secret. This is of course similar in simplicity to Clark Kent's disguised, a pair of glasses, which is equally ridiculous that no one has figured it out.

The superhero genre was still popular at the time, thus providing the show with popular cultural verisimilitude, however the show also references the highly popular martial arts craze of the 1970s 'Kung-Fu'. The live action series of the same title was first broadcast in 1972, and aired for three years, while *Hong Kong Phooey* was broadcast. The very popular martial arts film *Enter the*

Dragon starring Bruce Lee was released in 1973, as well as a number of other from the same genre which were less successful in the west. As well as the film and television references, the song 'Kung Fu Fighting' by Carl Douglas was number one in the American pop charts the same week that *Hong Kong Phooey* premiered demonstrating the level of popularity of the marital arts, and therefore how potentially successful the anicom would be.

The two sections of the episode are linked here with Penry at the station house trying to get his cleaning equipment in to shape at the start of the first section, between the two and at the end of the second, thus providing the familiar status quo. The next two episodes in the case study, 'The Claw/ Hong Kong Phooey Vs Hong Kong Phooey' and 'The Abominable Snowman/Professor Crosshatch' follow the same structure with two main stories combined by a common theme, Penry's activities in the Police station.

Hong Kong Phooey uses an unusual narrative structure with two main stories linked by a third common plot running through the whole episode. Though most sitcoms structure the plot in 'acts', or around the commercial breaks these acts tend not to be resolved until the end of the episode, whereas *Hong Kong Phooey* features resolutions to each of the main plots, only resolving the link plot at the end of the episode. However this resolution does restore the familiar status quo which is a key convention of the sitcom genre.

The show's comedy consists of visual gags, slapstick and 'one-liner' jokes rather than social observational comedy which was present in the earlier Hanna Barbera anicoms of the 1960s, or indeed of its 1970s counterpart *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*. The comedy is then not aimed explicitly at adults in terms of the

level, or sophistication of the comedy, however it does not require 'adult' humour to be classified as a sitcom. The show was broadcast as a children's cartoon and as such considered as one by the audience, again the scheduling, and as such the institutional classification of the genre suggested the show was a children's series rather than part of the sitcom genre. The initial viewing of the show, focussing on the style of comedy would confirm this notion of children's show, however closer analysis of the series content with its popular culture references and overall sitcom narrative structure would suggest that it can be classified as an anicom as I have defined it.

Anicom – Changing audiences and decline

The three shows discussed here all share the sitcom narrative structure, as well as two of the shows emulating the themes of their contemporary live action sitcoms. Structurally the shows all conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom. Further examination of the shows is required to establish their conformity on terms of the Proppian characterisation and Grote's notion of character groupings. We can apply the same formula to the shows as in the previous chapter in order to assess the characterisations.

Table 4 demonstrates that the shows feature the character types as identified by Propp and Grote. However in this case I would suggest that rather than Grote's 'scoundrel' as the common type I have identified characters from each show in that column but would class them as Propp's villain, rather than merely a scoundrel. In most live action sitcoms, or even the anicoms from the 1960s, I would suggest that the scoundrel role can often be played by the hero figure, or any of the other key characters. In the case of *Help it's the Hair Bear Bunch*,

Show	Date	Character Type				No. Chars.
		Hero	Fool	Innocent	Scoundrel	
Wait 'till Your....	1972	Harry	Ralph	Jamie/ Alice	Ralph	6
Hair Bear Bunch	1971	Hair	Square/Botch	Bubi	Peevly	5
Hong Kong Phooey	1974	Phooey/Spot	Penry/Phooey	Rosemary	various	4

Table 4 - Animated sitcoms after Propp and Grote 1970 -1979

Peevly's behaviour is almost a melodramatic villain, rather than merely a scoundrel. Likewise in *Hong Kong Phooey* the villain, or scoundrel, changes in every episode. However despite the changing character, the show always includes the role.

If we recall Grote's character groupings and the notion of the average number of characters per show and apply it to the table we see that the average is again five as suggested. The character types in these anicoms differed to those in the 1960s as the setting, or situation for the shows was different. The domestic family situation was dominant in the 1960s sitcoms, both live action and animated, however this changed in the 1970s. The situations for *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* and *All in the Family* were domestic sitcoms, but *Hair Bear Bunch* and *Hong Kong Phooey* featured work place situations. An examination of live action sitcoms in the 1970s suggests that the dominant situation for the decade was workplace based. Some shows would combine the two, and other featured a home setting but it was with friends rather than family, such as *Three's Company* (1977).[43]

Narrative

As in the previous chapter, each episode can be further broken down to examine the themes of the show and the nature of the 'ritual error' as defined in Marc's (1997 p.190) formula for the sitcom narrative. ("Episode= Familiar Status Quo=> Ritual error made=> Ritual lesson learned=> Familiar Status Quo.")

[43] See Appendix A for compilation of sitcom types.

Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home

In the first episode of the case study *Episode 3 'The Hippie'* we see that the ritual error is not confined to one event, but continues throughout the episode:

Chet has a new friend, Claude, a hippie and has invited him to dinner. => Claude worms his way into staying with the family, and eats all of their food while criticising Harry's politics. =>He encourages the children to support his ideals, leading Ralph, Harry's neighbour to believe that they are communist sympathisers (as he does every week). He builds a wall to divide them and tries to rally support from the other neighbours. =>Eventually, Harry decides to beat Claude at his own game by pretending to have changed his ways and become a hippie, thus illustrating that without working there will be no food for the family and Claude won't be able to freeload anymore. It backfires slightly as Claude refuses to go, but as the neighbourhood war escalates, the television company arrives. => Impressed by Claude's musical abilities, the television company offers him a lucrative deal, and he sells out, much to the disappointment of Chet. => However the family returns to normal and the neighbourhood dispute is over, thus restoring the equilibrium.

The ritual error begins when Claude comes to stay and Ralph builds his wall, but continues as Harry tries to persuade the children what life would be like if they were all hippies. The ritual lesson comes from outside intervention when the television crew reveal Claude's true capitalist sensibilities, suggesting that everyone has a price.

This theme is continued in the next episode *'The Beach Vacation'*:

In need of a holiday the family rent a cottage on the beach for two weeks, though Harry may have to still go to work during the week to pay for it! => The first day on the beach however poses a problem as three nudists have taken up residence on the beach, much to Harry and Irma's disgust. The children as usual object with protests about human rights. => Despite this, Harry gets the police involved, having the guy arrested. In the meantime, Ralph and his vigilante group have set up watch on the beach to stop the invasion of nudist 'commies'. => After chatting to the boy's father, Harry decides that he might actually be a decent kid and drops the charges. =>Meanwhile it is youngest Jamie who solves the problem by telling the nudist off for ruining his chances of setting up business and charging his friends to use the cottage facilities. =>Ashamed of getting in the way of enterprise, the nudist decides to leave the beach. =>The problem is resolved and the family enjoys the rest of their vacation, resolving the situation in this episode and restoring the equilibrium for the next episode.

Again the ritual error begins with an external group, in this case the nudists and the situation is made worse with Ralph's interference. The lesson learned in this episode occurs when Harry gets to know more about the kids and finds they have a decent family; however the problem is truly resolved when Jamie, an aspiring entrepreneur, tells the nudists how they have ruined his plans. Understanding the problem they agree to leave enabling Jamie's money making plans, again the nudists are respectful of capitalism, just as Claude was.

The issues of parental approval of love and political ideology are the focus of *Episode 6 'Love Story'*

While out shopping for a new jacket, Harry and Alice meet a young man named Norman who is looking for change to get the bus to college. => Impressed by his ambition Harry gives Norman a couple of dollars, but what he doesn't know is that Norman is really a beggar and the college story is a line he uses to get money. => Norman and Alice are instantly attracted to each other and decide to go on a date. =>They have Harry's blessing until he finds out about the begging. Of course Ralph finds out and wants Harry to put a stop to it. =>Alice protests that her family should accept Norman and the pair decide to get engaged. => Upon hearing this announcement, Harry contacts Norman's parents, who turn out to be extremely wealthy. =>Harry now approves, but Alice decides that Norman is not right for her now that she knows he really has money and was only begging to rebel against his parents, rather an idealist free spirit. The situation is resolved, restoring the equilibrium.

The ritual error is essentially Harry's misunderstanding of Norman's financial situation, again made worse by Ralph. Harry learns his lesson when he finally confronts Norman's parents (just as in the previous episode) however now it is also Alice who has learned a lesson from the false identity.

The use of the 'false' occurs in the next episode, *'Expectant Papa'* when it is used to essentially resolve the ritual error:

After experiencing some light-headedness and odd cravings over a short period of time Irma and Harry jump to the conclusion that Irma is pregnant. => They are excited until the children protest about the drain another child would be on their resources and the worlds, and Harry's co-workers suggest he is too old to have a young child, and that he will be unable to participate fully in the child's life. =>

The whole thing has also meant that their planned trip to Europe will have to be postponed. => Eventually the kids come round to the idea. => Irma finds out that it was a false alarm. => The equilibrium is restored and everything goes back to normal. The ritual error is again a misunderstanding, in this case the false pregnancy, the lesson is learned when the truth is revealed.

Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home's use of the sitcom narrative, as well as characterisation, reinforces the generic status of the show. The ritual error and subsequent lesson follows a pattern of upholding 1970s American ideals of family values and morals. The show deals with topical issues similar to its live action contemporaries, however the show's errors and resolutions consist of misunderstandings and the resulting clarification of the situation, which is revealed as less of an issue than previously thought.

Help, It's the Hair Bear Bunch

The narrative and ritual error in *Episode 3 'Raffle Ruckus'* are quite different from *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*. In this episode we see that the familiar status quo that was presented at the start of the episode is not recreated at the end exactly:

=>Peevly is making the animals work hard. => Hair rigs a raffle in order to gain control of the zoo. However Hair learns that the zoo is harder to look after than he thought. He plans to give the zoo back but hears Peevly scheming against him. => Peevly is foiled and in return for the animals help he must meet their demands. => order is restored to the zoo and the bears are better off.

The bears have improved their situation; however by the start of the next episode the situation will have been resolved. The ritual error occurs when Hair realises his scheme has backfired and that Peevly is scheming against him, but the lesson is learned when Peevly is foiled. The lesson resolves the situation for the bears, and in many instances improves their situation through the intervention of a third party, namely the superintendent of the zoo.

In the next episode in the case study, *Episode 9 'Gobs Of Gobaloons'*, the lesson is ultimately learned, again by Peevly. After getting in trouble again, the Bunch (along with the other animals) have to build Peevly a new pool and discover a treasure map in the process. The map leads to the area under Peevly's house. After various attempts to get at it, including a spoof of "The Great Escape," Peevly figures out what's going on and forces Hair to give him the map. Hair gives him a fake, but the bunch discovers whatever treasure that is found belongs to the country of Ptomania. The Bunch gives Peevly the real map, and he is forced to make reparations to Ptomania after he spends the treasure:

=> The animals are working for Peevly => they discover a treasure map. Peevly finds out and Hair gives him a fake map to distract him, while the bears find the real treasure. => Peevly has taken the treasure from the bears and starts to spend only to get in trouble when the owner comes looking for it. => The animals have triumphed over Peevly, though as in the previous episode the restoration is of the particular problem, or event, rather than a true return to the familiar status quo.

Again the error occurs when the bears realise the scheme has failed, but they solve the problem and simultaneously teach Peevly the lesson in this episode.

In *Episode 12 'The Bear Who Came To Dinner'* Peevly becomes victim of the bears' plan and though there is a ritual error of sorts, the bears are nearly caught; they ultimately win, without learning a lesson:

=>the bears are trying to escape from Peevly and the zoo. => Square 'injures' himself and as a result Peevly has to let Square stay in his house. After managing to sneak out Botch sees the bears and they have to try to get back to the zoo. => After Hair tells the superintendent how 'well' Peevly has looked after Square, the blackmails Peevly. Botch joins in the blackmail after he slips on a banana peel too, and Bubi recites case law of another zoo being sued for 'criminal negligence'. => Peevly gives in to the demands but threatens to 'get' the bears eventually. As in previous episodes, the 'situation' or event which occurred is resolved with the Bears winning against Peevly. Their original situation will be restored by the start of the next episode.

The intervention of the zoo Superintendant is used again to resolve the situation in the bears' favour, by blackmailing Peevly for better treatment.

In the final episode in the case study *'The Diet Caper'* the error is yet again the result of a scheme which has gone wrong, and the lesson learned when the bears get the better of Peevly. This time it is Botch's stupidity, as an intervention which enables the bears to succeed:

The bears get caught in the act of removing food from Peevly's fridge from a secret door in the back and are punished with a ban on food. The hungry bears try several tricks to get some food, but each time gets caught out. =>The next plan is named 'Operation Mole' and with the help of the other animals they

decide to tunnel from the zoo to the pizza place in town. =>They get a bit lost and end up in a 'haunted house' which turns out to be part of the funfair. =>After almost getting caught out again the Bears lead Peevly and Botch into the funfair, except they think they are really trapped in a haunted house. The bears use this time to raid the office fridge with all the other animals. =>When Peevly and Botch finally get back the bears convince the pair that they are holding a party for Botch's birthday. =>They get away with the scam because Botch can never remember his own birthday so can't be sure if it's true or not.

Applying Marc's formula to the series demonstrates that the series uses the sitcom narrative. Despite the differences between this series and its contemporary anicom, *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*, notably the return, by the studio, to the use of humanised animals as the main characters, and the show not being scheduled in prime time it exhibits other characteristics inherent in the sitcom genre, such as characterisation and narrative structure. The show also shares common themes with *Hogan's Heroes* which is evident from the textual analysis.

Hong Kong Phooey

As I have previously discussed, the narrative in *Hong Kong Phooey* is unusual in its use of two sections which are joined by a common plot, such as the Sarge taking a test throughout both sections of the episode. In *episode 1 'Car Thieves/ Zoo Story'* the structure of the series is established in this opening episode and the characters are introduced. In 'Car thieves' a couple of thieves are stealing cars around the city. After tricking HKP with their old lady disguise, he manages to catch up with them and foil their plans:

=> Penry cleaning the Police Station, when the call comes in about the crime. => Phooey is fooled by the robbers and allows more cars to be stolen. => By accident and with Spot's help, Phooey foils the crooks and takes them to the police station where Rosemary and 'Sarge' are impressed and in awe of Hong Kong Phooey.

=> Penry returns to work but hears another call about the missing zoo animals. => The crooks keep stealing kangaroos until they can find their diamond. => Phooey hides in a kangaroo's pouch in order to be 'stolen' and be taken to the crooks hideout, where he can foil their plan. => Phooey returns to the police station with the crooks. He then transforms back into Penry with no-one suspicious about his secret identity. The rest of the episodes in the case study follow the same pattern with the same type of ritual error being made by Hong Kong Phooey throughout, as the following examples demonstrate:

Episode 7 'TV Or Not TV/ Stop Horsing Around'

=>Crooks are stealing all of the televisions in the city, including the one from the police station. =>HKP hides inside a set in a closed television store so he can be stolen and taken to the crooks hideout. =>Once inside he can foil their plans. Familiar Status Quo returns in the scene between the crimes.

=> In 'Stop Horsing Around', prize racehorses are being stolen right from the track =>HKP decides to ride one in a race to follow the trail. =>It eventually leads to the circus where the clowns have been stealing the horses and disguising them with paint to use in their show. =>HKP dresses up as a clown to infiltrate the gang. =>He foils the plan when he spills water on the horses and the paint

comes off, revealing their true identity. Spot helps in this section. => Penry is back at the police station and his janitor job. The crimes have been solved and the equilibrium is restored.

Episode 9 'The Claw/ Hong Kong Phooey Vs Hong Kong Phooey'

=>An unseen thief is stealing gems and paintings from the museum with the aid of large claw on the end of a retractable arm. =>HKP tries to stop it and finds out that a mad professor is controlling the claw. =>With the usual help from his 'Hong Kong book of Kung Foo' and Spot, HKP saves the day again.

=> usual linking section between crimes. In the second section =>a crook has disguised himself as our hero and is collecting all of the rewards that HKP refuses. =>After several stints in jail, and several changes back and forward between Penry and HKP=> the crook is caught out. => Equilibrium is restored.

Episode 10 'The Abominable Snowman/Professor Crosshatch'

=>A pair of crooks are stealing lots of ski and skating equipment so they can open their own winter resort. =>With the aid of skates on the 'Phooey mobile' HKP and Spot manage to catch up to the crooks. =>they foil them by freezing them in a block of ice. => Link section, Sarge is taking his Captain's exam and Penry ruins it while cleaning.

=>Professor Crosshatch has managed to crossbreed several species of bird to produce a super bird which he uses to help him steal valuables. =>As usual our hero inadvertently saves the day (Spot really foils the Professor). =>In the meantime the sergeant is still trying to take his captain's exam which Penry

manages to ruin again when handing over the Professor that Hong Kong Phooey has 'left' for them.=>equilibrium restored.

While *Hong Kong Phooey* follows the rather unusual narrative of dividing the episode into two segments, the events over the segments still conforms to the sitcom narrative as a whole, thus enabling the series to be categorised as an anicom. The ritual error in every episode is Hong Kong Phooey ending up captured or trapped by the crooks, however the situation is resolved, or lesson learned, when Spot intervenes and helps Hong Kong Phooey out. The equilibrium is also restored as Hong Kong Phooey resumes his alter ego, Penry with neither of his co-workers aware of his secret identity.

Just as in the 1960s, the anicom develops in parallel with the live action, always enabling the progression of the genre. However the relationship between the text and society, while not a development in the larger sitcom genre, is a development in the anicom as the previous anicoms were never as obviously political as *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home.*

These shows, even if not specifically broadcast for an adult audience, or indeed even produced for one, do follow conventions of verisimilitude, both generic and cultural. The continued success of the shows, *Help, it's the Hair Bear Bunch* and *Hong Kong Phooey* suggest that the scheduling, while crucial to the classification of the shows was not necessary for success. Both shows have become cult favourites with the adults who enjoyed the shows as children. In the case of *Hong Kong Phooey* the renewed interest in the late 1990s and early 2000 is evident through the quantity of merchandise available, aimed specifically at adults. This has been aided by the show's continued broadcast in syndication

and on specialist cable networks devoted to animation, (this 'nostalgia' will be discussed further in a later chapter).

The same question then applies to this show, and later Hanna Barbera shows, as we asked of *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home.* Was the decline in production due to a lack of ratings or was it a lack of general interest from the audience to maintain the adult anicom genre? Were the adult themes no longer popular in anicoms which led to a return to a children's format of 'cartoons'? The audience were perhaps used to the anicom in primetime, but by the time Hanna Barbera produced *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* it was perceived that they were merely copying a live action show, not producing anything different, like the 50s in prehistoric America or the 60s in outer space. These were unusual settings for comedy, so perhaps attracted more interest, but animation which reproduces what is already available in live action is pointless? Without literature in this area it is difficult to answer these questions, however my case studies throughout the thesis will seek to address this decline and the potential reasons for it. This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

It is useful to examine the live action sitcoms which were broadcast in parallel to the anicoms to determine the themes which the audiences engaged with and more importantly those which the networks, and their sponsors, engaged with. William Hanna saw in the 1970s a new audience which they could entertain, the teenage audience who had long been ignored. He felt that, "Pop music shows like *Sonny and Cher* and *The Monkees* featuring long-haired youngsters sporting bell-bottomed jeans and electric guitars showcased the current trends of American Youth." (p.141). This could be transferred to the medium of

animation, "It was lively, clean entertainment and if they could become hits as live action shows, they could be just as much fun to watch as cartoons." (Ibid.) His feelings clearly influenced the content of *Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* with the main characters sporting the latest fashion trends, including bell bottom trousers.

As well as these elements coming through in the anicoms, Hanna Barbera produced animated series with music and comedy in *Scooby Doo, Where are You? (1969), Josie and the Pussycats (1970)* and an animated version of the live action music show *The Partridge Family* (1970-74) in *The Partridge Family:2200 A.D. (1974).* These shows became hits for Hanna Barbera and became the templates for many of the shows they produced throughout the 1970s and 1980s. The studio had found a new audience and with it new success. This suggests that the studio had accepted that there was no longer the adult audience for the prime time anicom, and altered their production to fulfil the new markets needs.

Live action sitcom in the 1970s was pushing boundaries with the controversial Norman Lear comedies *All in the Family* and their equally controversial spin offs, particularly the feminist series *Maude*, however Jones has observed that despite the success of these shows and their political content, the vital sponsors were not being delivered their prime audiences.

> "Some sitcom producers would try to change that tendency...most would flow with it, gunning for the less affluent, the less educated, the suburban, the old, and the very young. The sitcoms that followed *All in the Family* put steadily less emphasis on political dialogue and generational dynamics and steadily more on sex, shock value, sentimentality, and loveable buffoons." (1992 p. 212)

The sitcom, both live action and animated was changing and these changes ultimately impacted on the production output of the shows and their content. With different audiences, new regulations being introduced which limited the type of comedy in the shows and increasing pressure from external groups the anicom in the 1970s went into decline. This decline would continue into the 1980s and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5 - Case Study 1980s

In earlier chapters we have examined the development of the animated sitcom, from the very first example of this sub genre with *The Flintstones*, through the 1960s, to *Wait 'til your Father gets Home*, Hanna Barbera's last prime time anicom, in 1972 (which ended in 1974). This was the last prime time anicom to be broadcast until *The Simpsons* first aired in December 1989, with its first full season starting in 1990. The decline in anicom production in the 1970s became apparent through the decade's case study, seen in the previous chapter. There were less anicoms being produced, and those which were, were scheduled as part of the Saturday morning line which catered for a younger audience.[44] With *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* only being produced for syndication, without a major network backing, and only being commissioned for two seasons it seemed that there was less support for the genre from networks, which were unwilling to schedule the shows in prime time, than there had previously been in the 1960s. By the 1980s there was even less support with networks only scheduling animated series in daytime slots.

This chapter examines the decline of the anicom in the 1980s, in terms of the animation being produced by the Hanna Barbera studio, as the original and sole producer of the anicom. The chapter will attempt to establish the reasons for this decline in the anicom as well as the apparent decline in the live action sitcom and the changing network system facing new regulations and changing audience patterns.

[44] This includes *Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* and *Hong Kong Phooey* as discussed in the previous chapter.

Though there has been a significant amount of research published on 1980s television there is a lack of information regarding the disappearance of the animated sitcom. We saw evidence of the gradual decline in production in the previous chapter though this was never explicitly documented in any of the literature surrounding the animated series. In order to establish possible reasons for this decline it is necessary to look at a variety of areas of study. For example this chapter will examine the television networks and regulation, particularly how the networks were affected by new FCC regulations, and pressure from external groups, and how this ultimately affected the sitcom genre as a whole. it is also necessary to discuss the changing political climate in the US in the 1980s and its effects as well as the increasing commodification of animation through merchandising. The discussion of each of these areas seeks to determine the possible contributing factors behind the decline in anicom production and the changes in the sitcom genre.

The Decline of the Sitcom

The previous chapter suggested that the 1970s saw the beginning of a decline in the anicom, in terms of the reduction in the production and their absence from the prime time schedules, in comparison to the previous decade. The only prime time anicom, *Wait 'til Your Father Gets Home*, was discussed with two other animated series, *Help it's the Hair Bear Bunch* and *Hong Kong Phooey*. The analysis of these animated series demonstrated that though the shows had been broadcast in a morning slot, and as such defined by the institution as children's cartoons, they conformed to most of the generic conventions of the sitcom. Given these shared generic conventions, and given the scarcity of literature on the animated series itself it is necessary to look at the literature on the live action

sitcom to identify if there was a decline in the sitcom genre as a whole, in terms of both its popularity as well as production rate.

Susan Horowitz argues that in the 1970s, sitcoms constituted eight of the ten top rated shows, "But now, in the 1980s, the popularity of the form is waning." (1987 p.106) She provides evidence of this by citing, "In the 1982-83 season, there were only three situation comedies among the top ten shows. Last season, 1983-84, no situation comedy was consistently able to hold a place among the highest-rated shows..." (Ibid.). This theory is supported by Marc who compares the ratings achieved by the sitcom in 1976 by *Happy Days* (1974-84) as 31.5 (percent), whereas in 1994, the number one rated sitcom in prime time *Seinfeld* (1989-98) only achieved 20.6 of the ratings (1997 p.177) suggesting that the sitcom audience had declined considerably over twenty years. However while the ratings figures have declined and Marc argues that the top rated sitcom in the 1990s would not reach the top 25 in the 1970s it seems that this is relative to the climate of network television. As such there are a number of contributing factors which can explain this drop in audience figures.

Horowitz argues that the decline is related to the changes in family life and habits between the two decades, "... [the sitcom] has barely survived the breakdown of the traditional family for which it was originally designed." (1987 p.106.) Horowitz alludes to the first generation of television sitcoms in the post war era which were made for a family audience, and featured the 'perfect suburban family'. For instance one such show *Father Knows Best* (1954-60) is referred to by Jones as representing "...a model social unit for the new suburban family." (1992 p.97). The family representations in the 1970s sitcoms were more realistic

in terms of their representation of changing family life, however in the 1980s the sitcom would return to the 'model unit' rather than realism.

David Marc supports the notion that the sitcom was specifically designed for a family audience and as such its form would be a reflection of this, "In the fifties and sixties, the sitcom had offered the Depression-born post-World War II adult group a vision of a peaceful prosperous suburban life centred on the stable nuclear family" (1997 p.335). However Marc suggests that the sitcom was forced to keep up with the changes in family life and politics by the 1970s, "...if the sitcom was to retain its credibility as chronicler and salesman of American family life, these new styles, types, customs, manners, issues...had to be added to its mimetic agenda." (Ibid.) Here Marc refers specifically to the controversial show *All in the Family* (1971 -79), which influenced Hanna Barbera's *Wait 'til your Father gets Home* (1972-74). These changes included the changing family structure described by Horowitz, as well as an adherence to a cultural verisimilitude which reflected issues and trends in the 1970s. Both *All in the Family* and *Wait 'til Your Father Gets Home* included references to the changes in society from simple changes in fashion, to the feminist movement and the country's international politics (particularly Vietnam), and in the case of *Wait 'til Your Father Gets Home* particular references to the country's concerns about communism. Despite producers attempts to politicise and update the sitcom by referring to these aforementioned issues, the sitcom genre as a whole, including the anicom, continued to decline in popularity.

The changes in the sitcom family in the 1970s are discussed by Richard Butsch (1992) in terms of the issue of class and gender in the situation comedy. Butsch

highlights the appearance and increase of working class families in the domestic sitcom in the 1970s, with the increasing use of a stereotypical patriarch as a 'buffoon' character. Jones also suggested that there was an increase in the 'loveable buffoon' (1992 p.212) in the 1970s in an attempt to reach a wider audience. However, by the mid 1970s it was clear that audiences were looking for a shift away from the realism of the earlier shows and favoured a return to 'traditional family values shows' such as *Happy Days* suggesting that audiences wanted an aspirational family sitcom instead of a dysfunctional, albeit more realistic one. The sitcom of the early 1970s reflected a dysfunctional family grouping which while reflective of the changing family dynamic, no longer provided the 'vision of prosperity' the early sitcoms had. The shows of the 1970s had enabled genre progression through the inclusion of such issues, however the initial interest in this type of sitcom could not be sustained in the changing decade which would see more regulation and control imposed on the networks by third parties.

Horowitz (1987) sees a decline as partly a result of the rise in divorce rates over two decades. "The divorce rate… soared through the sixties and seventies and has continued high in the eighties…trends that promoted the pursuit of entertainment outside the house." (p.107). In addition the cost of the technology decreased to a level where it became feasible for families to have more than one television in a household, often in bedrooms, therefore the family were no longer sitting down together to watch the same programs. This segmentation is also described by Marc as one of the key reasons for the poor ratings the later shows received in comparison to the phenomenal success of *All in the Family*, "Due to the fragmentation of the mass audience brought about by multiplying viewing

options, this kind of thorough penetration of national consciousness would rarely be achieved again" (1997 p.177). *All in the Family*'s ground breaking content had been nationally successful, but the new viewing habits of the 'family' with VCR's and the emergence of cable channels as alternatives to the networks had divided and subsequently reduced the audience for the sitcom.

With the audiences now segmented in such a way, "...the sitcom is more vulnerable than other television formats for today's competitive situation..." (Horowitz 1987 p.108). The sitcom was designed for a family audience, and with that audience fragmented, Horowitz suggests that viewers will be looking for alternatives, individually. As well as fragmented household audiences, the 1980s saw an increase in the number of cable channels which provided the viewer with more choice than simply the three main networks, ABC, CBS and NBC. This together with the introduction of home video recorders, which enabled the viewer to dictate their own viewing schedule away from the prescribed network line ups, would have contributed to these changes in television consumption. Horowitz suggests the industry were aware of this apparent decline in popularity, "...network executives protest that they are baffled by the erosion of a genre that has nourished television from the beginning." (p.111). With viewer loyalty to the sitcom declining, networks tried to fill the gap by repackaging the existing shows by creating blocks of comedy shows in the schedule line ups to try to attract an initial audience to one show who would then stay on to the next. This method of block programming did not fill the gap, though the same tactic is used with some success today, and the networks had to look to different kinds of programs to attract large audiences.

In addition to the aforementioned changes in family life, to the 'nuclear' family unit and change in viewing habits, changing political and social culture in America also had an impact on the content of the sitcom as Marc suggested. Another threat to the sitcom's success was competition from the new action adventure drama series' which Horowitz identifies as 'lighthearted shows' (p.108). 'Lighthearted' shows such as *The A-Team* (1983-87) appealed to wide audiences. The drama was successful in a television environment where audiences had apparently become tired of the perfect suburban family sitcoms.

The success of more subversive shows such as *All in the Family* and its many spin offs (outlined in the previous chapter) suggest that the audiences did not require their sitcom families to be the perfect 'suburban units' of the *Father Knows Best* era. However the apparent decline in popularity of the sitcom as a whole would further suggest that by the 1980s, mass audiences were no longer looking for the alternative sitcoms either. The most successful sitcoms in the late 1970s and early 1980s featured a return to the nostalgic ideal of the perfect family unit, while *The A-Team* recreated the family unit in a workplace relationship (as the later 1980s sitcoms would).

Whole families could appreciate these 'lighter' shows which all featured a 'surrogate family' grouping. *The A-Team* and other similar shows such as *Knight Rider* (1982-86) and *Magnum P.I.* (1980-88) featured a mixture of characters which would appeal to a wide group of people. Typically the handsome action hero, aided by a paternal character who would provide guidance for the main characters, was also helped by (or in the case of *Magnum* and *Knight Rider* was) a strong 'tough guy'. As well as these characters the shows

would also include a comic figure and a glamorous (and supportive) woman. These characterisations are the common character roles identified by Propp (1968) which are inherent in 'stories' (though Propp examined folk tales, these shows could be considered contemporary folk tales). While Grote also identified these character types in the sitcom, these shows were genre hybrids featuring a mixture of comedy, drama and action which could appeal to a wider audience than the domestic sitcom format.

The shows tend to stand alone in terms of plot development: there is very little character development from week to week, whereas while the sitcom focuses on the resolution of a new 'situation' each week, there is generally some character development, or plot development in the overall story arc. This ability of the viewer to watch occasionally and not be bound to always watch at the 'same time each week' is another reason why Horowitz suggests that they "...can attract more than a sitcom that depends on involvement with characters over a period of time." (1987 p.108)

Though there were sitcoms in the 1980s including those that specifically dealt with the family, such as *The Cosby Show* (1984-92) and *Family Ties* (1982-89), both highly successful and lasting for several seasons, there was a decline in the number of shows produced, and no anicoms were produced at all until 1989. The shows espoused middle class conservative values, the families were fairly well off with professional careers and generally well behaved children. In case of *Family Ties,* while the parents held liberal values from the 1960s, their eldest son was a dedicated Republican, ultimately working on Wall Street. Even though the shows were a return to the earlier 'family values' sitcoms, they were clearly

representative of the 1980s, they presented the ideal family life which could be possible with high enough aspirations to wealth.

Even the sitcoms which featured alternative family arrangements, reflecting the changes in society, of single parents sharing a house in *Kate and Allie* (1984-89), a male housekeeper living with his daughter in the house where he worked in *Who's the Boss?* (1984-92) or a group of friends frequenting the same bar in *Cheers* (1982-93), displayed a certain level of wealth and 1980s values of consumerism and conservative politics (particularly in the case of *Who's the Boss?*). While these shows were successful with long runs, Horowitz's earlier reference to the top rated shows, and Marc's comparison of ratings, demonstrates that they were not as popular as their predecessors had been.

However in the case of *The Cosby Show* and *Cheers* both shows portrayed idealised families previously seen in the live action sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s. The Cosby family (the Huxtable's) were a wealthy African American family, which in itself was fairly new in sitcom. While there had been African American families in earlier shows, particularly in the 1970s (*The Jefferson's, Diff'rent Strokes, Good Times*, *Sanford and Son*), none of these families had the level of class status that the Huxtable's had, with the parent's professional careers as lawyer and doctor. The show also featured established comedy star Bill Cosby which would have brought the networks a level of guarantee to the success of the show.

Likewise the family grouping of friends and co-workers in *Cheers* was an ideal family in a friendly setting 'where everybody knows your name'[45]. The bar setting featured a mix of professional and blue collar worker, single mother and refined lady, athlete and 'slob' all could be together in a utopian grouping where friendship was possible between the sexes and classes.

A commonality in the live action sitcoms of the 1980s is the use of either an established star in the show, or an established writer or producer. A proven track record would be essential with networks who were no longer taking risks as they had with Norman Lear, now faced with more restriction on the content of their shows. Known stars such as Bill Cosby in *The Cosby Show* and Tony Danza in *Who's the Boss?* as well as the production team behind *Cheers* with earlier success on *Taxi, Mary Tyler Moore Show* and *M*A*S*H* and the creator of *Family Ties* earlier work on *The Bob Newhart Show, M*A*S*H* and *Lou Grant* (the successful *Mary Tyler Moore* spin off) all of which were highly successful, long running shows, afforded the shows name recognition. The networks in the 1980s were taking fewer risks than previously to try to ensure success in the face of audiences fragmented by competition from cable television and VCR technology.

There was no single factor which influenced the decline in the production and popularity of the genre, with the changes in family life/structure, the availability of technology and the increase in the one-hour action drama, or lighthearted show, all contributing to changes in the television schedule. Thus having established this decline in the production and popularity of the live action sitcom,

[45] "Where Everybody Knows Your Name" is the title of the theme song from the show.

which is also evident in the anicom, it is important to look further into those factors, which would have had little affect individually, but as a whole, influenced the decline.

There are other areas of television that can be examined to determine possible reasons, such as looking at the network structure itself and scheduling decisions, which can have significant influence on the success or failure of programs.

Television Networks

Three major companies had essentially dominated the television network system in America since the transition from radio to television.[46] National Broadcasting Company (NBC), Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and American Broadcasting Company (ABC) had maintained an oligopoly for three decades, each holding the top position at one time or another. However from the late 1970s and early 1980s, the television networks like the sitcom, faced competition in the form of an increasing number of cable channels and the increasing use of the VCR. Cable television had been available in a limited form for a number of years, however with deregulation allowing the cable networks to control what they broadcast and the growth and expansion of the technology enabling more viewers to receive the service, the cable industry 'developed rapidly'. "The 3,506 systems serving nearly 10 million subscribers in 1975 leaped to 6,000 systems serving nearly 40 million subscribers just ten years later." (Strover 2004) A new network, FOX was emerging[47] and proving to be very popular with

[46] "1947 marked the end of television's interim period. 1948 marks TV's appearance as a major force." Gerard Jones 1992 p.31

[47] The network launched in 1985. The Museum of Broadcast Communications www.museum.tv/archives/etv/index.htm

younger audiences. With these forms of competition, the networks faced changes which would ultimately impact on the sitcom.

The networks were essentially the producers of the programming which could be sold to affiliate, local, stations. As television became more popular, more independent program makers began to emerge, producing the shows for the networks to distribute and exhibit. This practise of out-sourcing of shows allowed the networks to expand and develop more choice over time. As independent companies began to produce more shows for the networks, the role of the stars' agent became more important to the network. As Gitlin suggests, "The commercial bleakness of the 1981-82 season afforded the agencies a golden opportunity to prove indispensable as last minute packagers of star series." (1994 p.147) The agencies were valuable to the networks, which were under increasing competition to air the most successful shows.

Though the networks had the power to schedule any show they chose, they were under regulation from the Federal Communication Commission, FCC, which dictated certain aspects of the business practises of the networks. As well as regulation from the FCC, the networks faced a certain amount of content regulation from the sponsors who ultimately paid for the programming through advertising. The role of the sponsor had altered during the 1960s, from sponsoring a whole show as we saw in the 1960s (for example Kellogg's sponsoring *Top Cat*) to paying for advertising space between, and during programs. They were still the biggest source of revenue for the networks, and therefore an extremely important aspect of the business. If the sponsor was offended by the content of the show, or found it to be demeaning to one of their

products, sponsorship could be withdrawn. Sponsorship was also sometimes withdrawn in response to pressure from fundamentalist religious groups who organised boycotts of companies who supported certain shows.[48] "Early in 1981, at CBS, such last-minute cancellations were taking place at a rate of only six or eight a month...But a few months later...the networks began to notice and grow nervous about the rising rate of withdrawals." (Gitlin 1994 p.257). The networks were initially reluctant to give in to censorship, but as Gitlin suggests they soon began to conform to the pressure and the content of the shows changed to reflect the more conservative demands of the sponsors and pressure groups.

As well as the pressure from the FCC and advertisers, the networks also had to ensure that the vitally important audiences (which could make or break shows') were satisfied. Audience monitoring was carried out in the same way as it is today, with sample audiences' reactions to the programs being tested at the pilot stage. This helps the networks decide if they will schedule the show or not. Once the shows have been scheduled, the Nielson Company, who then provides ratings to the networks, monitors the audience. These numbers become vitally important in the continuing success of a show and inform the networks on the best time slot, and day for a show to be aired or if a show should be on air at all. According to Gitlin, "...pioneering shows defy the expectations of test audiences, and therefore test badly." (p.35) The Networks can still choose to schedule a show even if it tests badly, if they believe in the concept enough. This occurred in the 1970s with the Norman Lear sitcom, *All in the Family*. The show was not well received during testing, but the network decided to show it and give

[48] *Lou Grant* actor Ed Asner, was pressured to leave show due to his outspoken political views, though he refuse to leave the show was eventually cancelled. Gitlin 2000 p.p.3-16

the audience time to build. The decision paid off as the show became one of the longest running sitcoms of the 1970s and generated numerous spin-off shows (p.211-213). If the networks had not taken this chance, *Wait 'til Your Father Gets Home* may never have aired. The opportunity to allow an audience to gradually increase over a couple of seasons was common practise in the 1970s, however the increasing competition faced by the networks in the 1980s resulted in the networks becoming less likely to take a risk on a poorly testing, or poorly performing show. The networks needed to be sure of the audience reactions and during this time as Gitlin suggests, "Competition and measurement technique accelerated in tandem." (p.48). As previously discussed, the consequences of this safer method of decision making was a smaller number of live action sitcoms being produced. Those which were, were generally successful with long runs, however these shows had established names behind them. The ground breaking and daring political sitcoms of the 1970s disappeared as the 1980s progressed and the shows focussed instead on more aspirational subjects, with little controversy.

Once shows have proven their success, and have a long enough run they are eligible to go into syndication, where another television station buys the rights to show the program in re-runs (Gitlin 1994 p.66). In the 1970s the FCC changed the rules for syndication so the networks had less control of the individual shows, creating the 'Prime Time Access Rule' (Erickson 1989). With less control over the syndication stations' content, the networks began to face competition from them, as the old shows proved to be very popular with audiences.

Political climate in the 1980s and its effects on the sitcom

Another overriding factor, which influenced the sitcom and network television, was the change in the political climate in America in 1980. The new Republican President, Ronald Reagan inevitably prompted a shift to the conservative right which, while influencing change throughout the country, also affected television in many ways. As discussed in Jones (1992) the content of the shows, from drama to sitcom changed to meet the expectations of changing audiences. Other factors which affected change came from the increasing pressure from fundamentalist religious groups', and Parents' groups, boycotts as previously discussed, but also with the political content of the shows themselves. In the early 1980s, producers were discouraged from 'politically charged themes' (Gitlin 1994 p.10) The networks tried to follow perceived trends, "...many network executives in charge of series thought the country was moving to the right and television entertainment ought to move with it." (p.221)

The pioneering shows of the 1970s, such as *All in the Family* and *M*A*S*H* (1972-83) remained on the air, and continued to be popular, but the network executives avoided any new shows as politically or socially charged as those were. Gitlin again suggested that the networks had perceived the mood of the audience incorrectly in the 1980s. "...Many top people thought that a rightward swing in public opinion, combined with deep economical trouble called for a shift in the tone..." (p.205) According to Gitlin, the network executives believed that the audiences wanted, 'law and order on one hand and straight-out escapism on the other' (Ibid.) though he also suggests that the quality of the shows suffered. This may be true however there is no doubt that the shows such as *The*

A-Team, The Cosby Show and *Who's the Boss?* were very successful, popular with audiences and long running.

This 'law and order' and 'straight-out escapism' presented itself in the shows such as, "...fantasy a la *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, and male "hunks" a la *Magnum P.I.*" (Gitlin 1994 p.224) supports Horowitz's earlier description of 'light hearted' shows such as *Knight Rider* and *The A-Team* (Horowitz 1987 p.108). Feuer (1995 p.12) also suggests that the 1980s were a time when reality was 'kept out' of television, compared to the 1960s which kept 'reality in'. I would argue however that while the 'fantasy' shows of the '80s did keep reality out, we have seen in chapter 2 that during the 1960s there were a number of fantasy shows, such as *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie* which were so prevalent that Marc has termed them 'magicoms' (1997 p.107) a sub genre of sitcom thus Feuer's argument is not exactly accurate. However I agree that the content of the 1980s shows, and specifically the live action sitcoms discussed here, did demonstrate a shift from the realism of the 1970s. The representations of family were idealised and the action adventure dramas did indeed exhibit elements of fantasy in some of the plots, (not least the talking car 'KIT' in *Knight Rider*). This left little space for the politically charged sitcom.

The majority of the live action sitcoms on the air in the very early 1980s (80, 81) were shows which had been established in the 1970s. The new generation of family sitcoms such as, *Family Ties* and *The Cosby Show* were not broadcast until 1982 and 1984 respectively. As Gitlin noted, "In general the networks were taking fewer chances now." While Gitlin was referring to television as a whole, we have already seen how this affected the sitcom, with the networks

commissioning shows from well established producers, writers and stars and taking less risks in the content of the shows they did commission.

Consumerism - Cartoons

The sponsors buying the advertising space between the shows had a great deal of influence over the networks and the content of the shows, which became evident in the animated series which were aired in the 1980s. Of the Reagan era Gitlin comments that "In an economy devoted to selling, programs must be aids to selling..." (p.25). Butsch reinforces this notion and argues that the networks create programs to suit the advertisers, and that, "An advertiser's preferred program is one that allows full use of the products being advertised." (Butsch 1995 p.407)

This notion was evident most in the animated series of the 1980s which re-defined the cartoon, after the anicom which had changed the format from theatrical short to a half hour format, to once more become an entertainment form aimed specifically at children. When Hanna Barbera's *Wait 'til your Father gets Home* was cancelled after only two seasons the studio turned their attention to producing animated series for a Saturday morning audience.

The Saturday morning cartoon shows had been popular since 1967, with all three networks having "full schedules of Saturday morning programming from 9.00a.m. to 12.30p.m., showing nothing but animated programs..." (Mittel 2003 p.34). The schedules were made up of re-cycled old theatrical cartoons such as the old Warner Bros. shorts, which were being repackaged into half hour time blocks, and new cartoons which were made specifically for children. Shows were often packaged with two or three shorts around a main 'star' such as *The*

Bugs Bunny Show or *The Magilla Gorilla Show*, as well as those derived from popular shows or comics, as spin-offs such as *The Archie Show*.

The Magilla Gorilla Show, 1963, is of particular note as it was, "...one of the first syndicated cartoon properties created expressly to sell toys, a practise that would grow into a science by the 1980s'." (Erickson 1989 p.124). The show was created in collaboration with the toy company Ideal who produced character toys of Magilla to be sold alongside the series.[49]

This practise increased over the years as it was the ideal way to advertise a product without explicitly advertising it, in a similar way to product placement, "Companies like Kenner, Mattel, and Hasbro all achieved some of their most profitable success by combining toys and television." (Burke 1999 p.30). The FCC were constantly under pressure from groups such as Action for Children's Television (ACT), who campaigned to 'improve' the quality of children's programming which they believed was functioning as half hour commercials for toys. (Burke 1999) There was a great deal of concern from these groups over the quality of children's programming, that it be educational enough and not overly commercial.

In the 1980s, however, with the 'shift to the right' and more emphasis placed on the cartoon as a commodity and its marketing power, the content of the Saturday morning schedules changed. According to Burke (1999 p.40-44) these schedule changes began in the mid to late 1970s when it became apparent to the networks that the Saturday morning time slot was not particularly profitable. The networks began to rerun animated series, such as Warner Bros. 'Looney Tunes'

[49] Don Markstein (2001) "Toonopedia" at www.toonopedia.com

series or the earlier Hanna Barbera series *Scooby Doo, Where are You?* (1969 - 70), which had proven success and would save their budgets. Erickson suggests that a combination of Reaganism and big business brought about this change, "The upsurge in assembly-line animation was brought about by certain changes affecting the FCC" (p.289). Hanna Barbera Studios were extremely busy trying to meet the demand from networks and syndication to produce enough animation to fill the schedules and fight off the competition from the other networks. The new chairman of the FCC appointed when Reagan became president relaxed the rules about the educational content of the shows, which allowed them to be more commercial.

In order to counter the claims from ACT of the blatant advertising the shows contained, the cartoon producers would insert 'messages' from the characters about friendship, sharing or other moral statements, which would attempt to appease the complaints. Timothy and Kevin Burke suggest that (referring to the new action adventure animated series), "Morals were the price you had to pay for action-adventure [cartoons] in the eighties" (1999 p.161)

The FCC regulations were relaxed in 1984, providing the opportunity for several producers of shows such as *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983) to 'jump on the bandwagon'. (Erickson 1989) The Saturday morning schedules[50] filled up with cartoons featuring characters which were available to buy in action figure, or plush toy, format, as well as advertisements which were slotted in the middle of the shows and between different shows. When the regulations were initially relaxed, they allowed the companies to market the toys based on the

[50] *He-Man* actually aired in the afternoon but Burke states that it had a "huge influence on subsequent Saturday morning programs." (1999 p.159)

shows, but not advertise during it. However by 1984, with the regulation relaxed further, the toys accompanying the show could be advertised during and after that particular show. [51]

The success of *He-Man* encouraged other companies to produce animation, such as the *Care Bears* (1985-88), which they could market toys from and Saturday morning essentially became a three hour commercial. The shows were also gender specific in their content, and marketing. Kevin and Timothy Burke describe the shows "consciously aimed at female audiences" (1999 p.164), such as the *Care Bears* as 'saccharine' while the boys had plenty of masculine shows such as *He-Man.* (Ibid.). The shows for girls were not all based on cute characters however. Following the success of *He-Man,* a spin-off show 'starring' He-Man's sister She-Ra, entitled *She-Ra, Princess of Power* was aired which featured the heroine as a strong female role model, "...the Xena[52] of the eighties..." (p.160), while fighting the forces of evil. She-Ra of course could also be bought in action figure form.

All of the factors which contributed to the decline in popularity and production of the live action sitcom had an effect on the anicom, from the viewing habits of the audience, the regulations to the networks attitudes to risk. This combined with these new shows which dominated the schedules in the 1980s, resulted in the disappearance of the animated sitcom format. The anicoms exemplified by earlier Hanna Barbera shows *The Jetsons* and *Top Cat* were left completely out of prime time, and had been since 1974, and the cartoon was firmly marketed as children's entertainment. The scheduling and marketing had re-classified

[51] Original source www.yesterdayland.com unavailable, now at http://web.archive.org/web/20030320023934/www.yesterdayland.com

[52] *Xena Warrior Princess* (1995 –2001) Adventure series featuring a strong female lead character.

animation to the status of children's cartoon, devoid of any of the social or political commentary that had been evident in *The Flintstones* and *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*. The earlier anicoms were either re-run or used as inspiration for spin-offs. New episodes of *The Jetsons* were produced in the 1980s (1984-87) for the Saturday morning audience and were devoid of the cultural references, such as technology, fame and television, which had marked out the earlier version. The reclassification of animation as a children's form is supported by Paul Wells who suggests that,

> "...the 1970s and 1980s were characterised by animation which was uninspired and aesthetically redundant. The form was merely employed as a graphic echo of live-action forms... *the* visual language by which it was assumed children were addressed." (Wells 2002a p.81).

Wells goes on to suggest that this assumption held by television producers continued throughout the 1980s as the 'cartoon' audience of the 1970s became the 'new movie generation' (Ibid.). I would suggest that this assumption led to the reclassification of animation; however I would argue that the previous chapter demonstrated the value of the 1970s anicoms produced by Hanna Barbera. The animation may not have reached the aesthetic levels of the 'golden age' of animation, but that was not their purpose, specifically with regards to *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*. However, Wells supports the argument in my earlier chapter that the decline of the anicom in the 1970s was partly due to the form merely copying the live action sitcom and therefore becoming rather redundant as far as the audience, and networks were concerned.

Wells suggests that it was the increasing use of the cartoon as toy advertisement which contributed to the decline of the form, in terms of quality and refers to

Kanfer who suggests that the changing markets contributed to the decline. Kanfer cites Friz Freleng, head animator with Warner Bros. "You could animate a [superhero] series on toilet paper and the networks would buy it" (p.82). While I would agree with the argument regarding the quality of the cartoons of the 1980s I would suggest that the decline of production of the anicom was a result of a combination of the above as well as the factors outlined earlier.

Hanna Barbera Animation - 1980s

The 'limited animation' technique used by the Hanna Barbera studio to produce large volumes of work at a fairly low cost and at a high speed has been frequently criticised by animation historians such as Maltin and Barrier, and Freleng above, as one of the reasons for a decline in the form. Wells however argues that Hanna Barbera's use of limited animation was "their only alternative in sustaining 'cartoons' of any sort in a major marketplace" (p.88). He goes on to suggest that they placed more emphasis on the, "...comic writing and engaging designs." (Ibid.), thus working within the economic constraints of the medium of television while maintaining a level of creativity and humour as evidenced in the 1960s and 1970s anicoms.

In the 1980s Hanna Barbera apparently took the failure of *Wait 'til your Father gets Home* as indicative of the audience mood and concentrated on producing cartoons for the children's Saturday morning market. Though not embracing commercialism to the same extent as the Filmation studio in their deal with toy company Mattel to produce *He-Man*, Hanna Barbera produced a number of shows which were animated, children's versions of live action shows. Examples

include shows such as *Laverne and Shirley* and *Mork and Mindy*[53] in 1981 and 1982 respectively, based on the popular live action sitcoms. While these shows were technically anicoms I have not included them as they were simply a remake of an existing show, whereas the other anicoms, while inspired by live action were original shows. This trend of animated versions of live action shows continued throughout the 1980s, as well as a number of spin-offs from Hanna Barbera's earlier successful work, and that of other studios, including *The Flintstones Kids*, *The New Yogi Bear Show* and *Popeye and Son*.

Most of the Hanna Barbera shows of the 1980s were of this nature and not explicitly linked to toy marketing, though in 1986, the studio produced *Pound Puppies*, which followed the release of a range of soft toys. The toys had been launched to coincide with a television special, which proved to be so popular a series was made. Though the show was made to sell toys, it has been suggested that the writing of the show marked it out against other shows of the same style such as *Care Bears* or *My Little Pony*. (Burke ed. 2003)[54] Perhaps the reason for the critique from animation theorists and film and television critics is due to the successful use of 'limited animation' by the studio which led others to do the same. Leonard Maltin in Wells states just that, "the cartoons produced by Hanna Barbera and their legion of imitators are consciously bad..." (Wells p.87). Limited animation had proven its effectiveness as a format which could be produced at low cost and in high volume, thus the animation style of the 1980s essentially became that of the limited style that Hanna Barbera adopted in 1960.

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[53] Between 1980 and 1989 there were approximately four animated versions of live action shows produced by Hanna Barbera (TV series, not specials or features). William Hanna and Tom Ito, *A Cast of Friends* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000).

[54] Kevin Burke is editor of yesterdayland.com, a now defunct website which served as a nostalgia database.

This style dominated animation in the 1980s, particularly in the Saturday morning schedules, as exemplified in shows such as *The New Adventures of Flash Gordon* (1979-80) and *Thundarr the Barbarian* (1980-84).

Industry

Having examined the networks and the regulations controlling them, the political influence on the sitcom, and the commodification of the cartoon, I will now focus on the producers, the television and animation industry, for potential contributing reasons as to the decline of the anicom.

Georgina Born (1993) argues that cultural producers play an important role in genre in terms of their authorship and influence on generic features. Born suggests that the cultural producers 'place' themselves in relation to each other to establish a "culturally imagined community", this also enables the audience to participate in this community as they, "are invited to enter into complicit imaginary identification with the producers" (p.236). At the same time Born suggests that the producers' 'self- placing' requires them to choose between "economic rewards of mainstream success, or the cultural capital attending avant-garde status" (p.237).

Born suggests that there was a specific period in the 1970s when the political nature of television dictated the work produced, "...independents became increasingly disillusioned with the 1970s legacy of aesthetic politics and turned to learning from dominant forms" (p.240).

The cultural producers however, like the networks, were bound by the changing politics and regulations surrounding television, "Political and regulatory factors

will play no small part in determining what kind of institutional scene and structure of subsidy survive the inexorable logics…" (p.241)

This notion of cultural producers being 'disillusioned' goes some way to providing an explanation for the aesthetic output from animators in the 1980s. We have already established a relationship between the networks, the political climate and the increasing trend to a consumer culture driven by toy related animation. In this last section the focus turns to the animation industry itself. Animation theorists and critics, such as Wells, above, have previously discussed the decline in the quality of the animation and the content of the shows in the 1980s, though rarely provide an explanation. In order to obtain an industry perspective of the animation climate in the 1980s I conducted a short interview with animator J.J. Sedelmaier, head of J.J. Sedelmaier Productions.[55]

Sedelmaier had previously described the industry as being in 'poor shape' in the 1980s and supports Born's notion of cultural producers, in this case animators, having to learn from the 'dominant form', 'The product was pretty bad but I got to see the process" (Sedelmaier 1998).[56] When asked to elaborate on the industry's 'poor shape', he outlined the situation in the industry from the early days of television, suggesting that the much maligned 'limited animation' techniques used by Hanna Barbera were encouraged throughout the 1980s in TV animation production, in terms of volume of production and economics.

> "From the time that TV programming was paired directly with the animation industry in the 50's, $$$ had become more and more the

[55] Interview via email with J.J. Sedelmaier head of J.J. Sedelmaier Productions (January 10 2003)
[56] J.J. Sedelmaier in John Canemaker, *PRINT* May/June 1998 Vol.LII:III , New York., 50 - 55 reproduced in Self promotional comic "Ambiguously Gay Duo Comics" - Nov. '02 White Plains, NY.

> driving force behind production approach. This translates into "limited animation" for obvious reasons. In this realm of TV production, animation was also primarily considered a technique that was best used to reach kids. My impression is that the combination of a "limited animation under all circumstances" approach, and the "it's just for kids - they don't know the difference" attitude, was a lethal mix for the industry. I think that most American producers/production companies just got lazy, and were frankly, encouraged to do so by the $$$ execs." (Interview January 10 2003)

This 'technique to reach kids' supports Well's earlier notion of the assumption that limited animation, and indeed animation in general was treated as the language to address children. Sedelmaier's response supports the argument put forward earlier in the chapter that suggest that while the networks still had control of the shows, they were also under increasing competitive pressure with each other and from new competition from cable and video. As a result of this competition, the studios were, in turn, under pressure from the networks to produce a lot of different shows. This continued throughout the 1980s until the Saturday morning schedules reached a saturation point.

It wasn't until the late 1990s that Sedelmaier saw the industry change, which allowed the industry to develop further, once more including adults in the target audience.

> "My opinion is that it wasn't until both Richard Williams (with his passion for classic animation) and MTV (with its use of independent animators and multitudes of styles/techniques to produce their network ID's) came on the scene in the early 80's, that people - especially in advertising - woke up to the potential of animation. It's also the start of an understanding of animation as a viable means of reaching ADULTS." (Ibid.)

The use of animation 'buffers' between music videos on MTV increased until the cable channel began to include longer animation sequences and ultimately the

successful comedy series *Beavis and Butthead* created by Mike Judge and initially produced by J.J. Sedelmaier. This increase in animation, targeted to adults and scheduled appropriately, had the effect of changing the industry again, leading to a shift back to the anicom, through the institutional genre definitions, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. This shift, and emergence of a new audience was in part due to,

> "...the fact that the baby-boomers are now adults. They're adults that not only watch TV – they are in a position to PROGRAM the shows that air! These folks grew up as the first TV generation and understand its power and influence. On top of that, they're actually quite fond of their childhood memories and have learned how to dovetail all this together." (Ibid.)

The younger network, FOX, was becoming increasingly successful particularly with a young adult audience and was looking to play a more significant role in the primetime schedules, to compete with the 'big three' networks, NBC, ABC and CBS. This new audience FOX were targeting is the same group Sedelmaier refers to, who were looking for new forms of entertainment, as well as being nostalgic for old forms. The comedy series *The Tracey Ullman Show* was already successful on the network and the execs decided to produce the animated shorts between the sketches in a separate time slot as a half hour anicom. The show was *The Simpsons* which has now been running for fourteen years, and is one of the longest running sitcoms on American television, despite Hal Erickson's initial thoughts of the show, "The only detraction was the dreadfully unfunny animated sequences used as buffers between sketches" (1989 p.320). The *Simpsons* essentially transformed the industry and the anicom once more became a key feature of the prime time schedules. This development of the anicom and industry throughout the 1990s is explored further in the next chapter.

This chapter has argued that throughout the 1980s the anicom was essentially removed from the prime time schedules in favour of more commercially driven and profitable animation. The decline in the popularity of the sitcom as a genre, and the changes in the content which emerged reflected the politics of the decade. However it has become apparent that there was no single factor which affected the genre, but a number of contributory factors ranging from increasing competition from other channels and entertainment forms, and changing regulations, to the commodification of animation.

The importance of the institution on the classification of genre has been reinforced throughout the chapter. The lack of support from the networks, in terms of scheduling shows and the types of show broadcast was shown to play a vital role in the decline of the anicom. As a result the audience, also crucial in genre classification, accepted the networks' classification of animation as Saturday morning cartoon, until another shift would emerge in 1989. While the structure of the sitcom had remained the same, the genre itself had changed, however the social and cultural verisimilitude merely reflected the contemporary society, unlike the earlier sitcoms and anicoms, did not question or critique it. The new family structures presented an idealised version of a family unit, though not necessarily traditional it was a family grouping which was successful and generally happy.

Neale's (2000 p.56) assertion that genre must progress to survive is evident throughout the 1980s, the changes that occurred in that decade paved the way for another development in the genre which saw a change in the style of comedy as well as the structure of the show and increase in success of the sitcom. The

changes also enabled a progression in the anicom which would significantly advance the medium. This will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapter 6 - 1989 –2003: The New Anicom Cycle

The previous chapters identified a decline in the anicom in the late 1970s, which continued throughout the 1980s. This decline however appeared to reverse in the late 1980s with the emergence of a new adult audience, who seemed to accept animation as something more than a form of children's entertainment. Animation began to appear in the schedules away from the usual Saturday morning and back into prime time and late night time slots. This re-emergence of the anicom and its continued genre progression is examined in the following chapter.

The chapter begins by examining the emergence, in the 1990s, of an adult audience for the animation that had previously been scheduled as children's television, and the subsequent development of adult themed anicoms, such as *South Park*, alongside existing double coded anicoms such as *The Simpsons*. It examines the cultural regimes of these shows, paying particular attention to the way in which they both develop and depart from the live action situation comedy in relation to the project of realism. It discusses the social worlds that the characters in the shows inhabit, and the manner in which those worlds reference the external reality of American culture.

The continuing success of *The Simpsons* into the 1990s was inevitably accompanied by a growth in the number and variety of animated sitcoms on prime time television. Not since the heyday of the animated sitcom in the 1960s had audiences been given so much choice, with shows as diverse as *The Critic*, *King of the Hill*, *Dr Katz*, *Family Guy* and *South Park*. This chapter discusses these shows in terms of their development of the animated situation comedy, or

'anicom', and their place within the verisimilitude of the sitcom genre. As well as considering the commercial success of these prime time anicoms in the 1990s, the chapter investigates their recent decline and the emergence of new night time scheduled anicoms aimed exclusively at an adult audience.

The chapter also examines why, despite this boom in animated comedy, by the end of the nineties there was evidence of another shift in the market, with some of the most popular animated comedies, such as *Futurama* and *Family Guy*, being withdrawn from the schedules. One result of which was a series of highly visible web based campaigns by the programs' fans to save them. The chapter considers the emergence of night time scheduled anicoms aimed specifically at adults and based on the original Hanna-Barbera animations of the 1980s, such as Cartoon Network's 'Adult Swim' slot. Adult Swim airs on Saturday and Sunday evenings between 10pm and [time], showing a variety of animated series including anicoms and Japanese 'anime' series. Finally the chapter draws together the development of narrative and characterisation in the case studies and the increasing role of the audience in negotiation of genre categorisation and variation.

The first function of these case studies is to identify the extent to which these series conform to the generic characteristics identified in the anicoms studied so far, particularly the structure, themes, character types and ensembles of each show. The second is to again identify how these shows modify, enlarge or abandon those generic characteristics. Taken together this interplay of innovation and repetition enable the genre to remain successful and be "miraculously seductive" (Born 1993 p. 232)

The last two chapters examined the decline of the anicom in the late 1970s and 1980s. Studios concentrated on the production of animation series for the highly profitable Saturday morning children's audience. These series were increasingly commodified until the shows functioned as advertisements for the merchandise they inspired. Shows such as *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* and *Care Bears* were produced to sell the toys they represented. This changed however, in 1989 with the premier of a new anicom which without exaggeration changed the perception, content and style of television animation.

The Simpsons

The previous chapter discussed the emergence of a new fourth network FOX which targeted a younger demographic than its counterparts and in doing so took more risks in their programming. The network had been successful with the live action sitcom *Married...with Children* (1987-97) a domestic sitcom which took the dysfunctional family to new levels. Where *All in the Family* featured a father at odds with his children, *Married...with Children* features a family at odds with each other. No-one in the family seems to get on, particularly the parents Al and Peggy Bundy, however this show does not present the ideological conflicts of the 1970s as in *All in the Family* or *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*. The comedy in *Married...with Children* is largely an exchange of verbal insults among the family members and Al's attempts to find a way out of his life as a minimum wage shoe salesman with a family he resents.

This new dysfunctional family as a polar opposite of popular aspirational sitcom *The Cosby Show* was very successful and FOX took this further when they decided to develop *The Simpsons*. Despite the previous decline in the anicom,

and the networks' habit of scheduling animation on Saturday mornings, FOX seemed to embrace the form and its potential for successful, albeit alternative, comedy. Throughout the thesis I have argued that the support from the networks (represented through scheduling as well as broadcasting) is vital to the success of the anicom. Sidney Clifton, head of development at Film Roman (the production company behind *The Simpsons*) supports this, "You have to have a network that has a vision..." (Strike 2003 p.7) and FOX were willing to take the risk on *The Simpsons*.

The Simpsons was created by cartoonist Matt Groening and began as thirty-second 'interstitials' (short segments surrounding the commercials) for *The Tracey Ullman Show* in 1987. It first appeared in its thirty-minute form as a pilot episode in December 1989 and began in a prime-time slot in January 1990.

As the first successful anicom in nearly two decades, there has already been a significant amount of research into many aspects of the show. As well as a number of academic papers (which are discussed in the final section of this chapter), there are several books, from episode guide and TV companions to texts on philosophy and religion on the shown (Irwin et al. 2001). There is also a vast fan base which contributes to a variety of websites devoted to the show. One particular site, 'The Simpsons Archive' features as a database of information, which includes very specific details on every element on individual episodes available on the Internet[57].

The Simpsons focuses on the Simpson family which consists of parents, Homer and Marge, and their '2.5' children. At the head of the family is Homer (voiced

[57] www.snpp.com

by Dan Castellaneta), a rather lazy and overweight 'buffoon' who often gets into crazy schemes (the source of a great deal of the slapstick comedy in the show), but ultimately cares about his family. His wife Marge (Julie Kavner) acts as the moral centre of the family, though she has a strange blue beehive hairdo, she is much slimmer than her husband, but is usually content with her role as housewife. Their relationship is reminiscent of that of many sitcom couples of the past including *The Flintstones* though Homer is never as vocal in his anger towards his wife as Fred (whose yelling of 'Wilma' is featured in the credits of the show), or his live-action counterparts would have been. This is in part due to societal changes leading to slightly more balanced male, female roles, where male dominance and abusive behaviour to his wife is no longer tolerated as a source of amusement. An example of this in the aforementioned live action sitcom *Married, with Children* where the husband and wife are equally verbally abusive to each other.

The other members of the family are ten year old Bart (Nancy Cartwright) who is the epitome of the rebellious youth figure in US culture (though never as bad as some of his school mates). Eight-year-old daughter Lisa (Yeardley Smith) is the brain of the family and with her mother tries to uphold the moral fibre of the family. The stereotypical 'nuclear' sitcom family is completed by the 0.5 child, baby Maggie who never speaks, but constantly sucks a pacifier. They also have both a cat and dog with which they live in their 'middle' American detached house.

The Simpsons is set in the fictional location of Springfield, which depicts the 'average' American town. The family, too, is 'average'—with the exception that

in their animated form the characters have yellow skin and four fingers on each hand. The show itself is makes reference to the US sitcoms which have come before it, set in an 'anywhere' USA location of Springfield. This was name of the town from 1950s sitcom *Father Knows Best* as well as one of the most popular town names in the US, nearly every state has one. Its location in *The Simpsons* has become something of a running game between the writers and the fans as the fans constantly try to guess the real location of the show. As well as numerous references to the traditional domestic shows, the theme of *The Simpsons* in the sense of its look and style particularly with the clothes the characters wear (Lisa and Marge both wear pearls, and Bart carries a slingshot like *Dennis the Menace* (1959-63)) are reminiscent of an earlier time, or earlier sitcom ideal.

'Our Favourite Family'

The series follows the generic regime of a type of live-action family sitcom; the family members are extremely dysfunctional, often outwardly violent to one another (Homer regularly throttles Bart), but ultimately they remain together through out their series of weekly 'adventures'. The episodes typically feature an event or ritual error which needs to be resolved to restore the equilibrium of the episode, while featuring a running gag in the opening credits sequence with a different final scene, or 'couch gag' as it is referred to by fans (and the writers).

Over the years the plots have varied, focusing on each member of the family and the resolution of an individual problem. These range from fairly serious issues such as Lisa's loss of a mentor and friend (Bleeding Gums Murphy in season one episode "Moaning Lisa") or Marge's near breakdown as she is constantly over

worked and under appreciated in "Homer Alone", to the less serious such as Bart's ambition to be a daredevil with his skateboard in the aptly titled "Bart the Daredevil" or Homer's brief time as the manager of a country and western singer in "Colonel Homer". The common element in all of these episodes and indeed throughout most of the series is the relationship of the family members and the importance of this relationship above everything else which happens to them. In 'Bart Vs Thanksgiving' Bart essentially ruins the family dinner by destroying a centrepiece which Lisa had been working on. He runs away and ends up at a homeless shelter where he has his meal. At this point he is glad he ran away and didn't apologise, but after seeing the homeless guys with nowhere to go he heads home. He is debating whether to go inside when he hears Lisa crying and realises what he has done, now genuinely sorry he returns to his family. The relationship between the siblings is the feature of many episodes, often with the children working together as allies against their parents, or someone from school. Throughout the series we find that Bart ultimately wants to look after his younger sister.

Homer and Marge's relationship is also the subject of many episodes, often with the temptation of another person coming between them. In 'Life on the Fast Lane' and 'The Last Temptation of Homer (to name two) each partner is tempted by another but ultimately they return to their spouse without actually consenting to an affair. The relationship between the pair in terms of Marge's role as housewife, or Homer as breadwinner is also raised in a number of episodes. In 'Homer Alone' Marge is driven to the edge when her family and household tasks demand too much of her. She ends up going away for a long weekend, leaving Homer and the children to fend for themselves. They are very happy when she

returns and vow to be more helpful in future. All of these examples reinforce the notion of family in the show.

In this respect the show has a fairly conservative view of the American family, however it is in maintaining these values of togetherness that the show presents its difference to other sitcoms. The show's basic theme is family but throughout the fifteen seasons, the show has also examined contemporary political and cultural ideology. Where *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* examined serious political issues such as abortion and post Vietnam paranoia, *The Simpsons* is less serious, however the show critiques nearly every element of culture through its use of satire and parody. Unlike its counterparts, *The Simpsons* is equally critical of everyone criticizing George Bush Sr. in one episode ("Two Bad Neighbours") and political rival Bill Clinton in another ("Treehouse of Horror VII").

The Appeal of "The Simpsons"

Though *The Simpsons* follows in a generic pattern set by the earlier series discussed in the thesis, it is the innovations in the program that have contributed to its immense success. *The Simpsons* like *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* provides the generic innovation through its references to contemporary issues. However *The Simpsons* does this while combining the elements which made the original anicoms such as *The Flintstones* so successful in the use of other features of comedy such as slapstick, visual gags and parody. Paul Cantor, for instance, observes that the series " . . . takes up real human issues everybody can recognize and thus ends up . . . less 'cartoonish' than other [animated] television programs" (1999 p.735). This is partly achieved through the construction of an entire 'reality' for the characters to inhabit that is as detailed as in any live-action

television show (Grossberg 1987 p.35). There are numerous ways of considering the concept of 'realism' in a television series. Corner contends that, in general terms, the notion of realism can be broken down into two forms, "the project of verisimilitude [. . .] like the real" and "the project of reference [. . .] about the real." (1998 p.70) *The Simpsons* generally features the project of reference, and in doing so can recreate an element of realism in the animation.

It has been said that *The Simpsons* actually aspires to move beyond the live-action sitcom in some respects; for example, "one of Matt Groening's intentions in creating *The Simpsons* was to make the audience forget they were watching a cartoon by portraying a fuller range of human emotions than that presented in most live-action sitcoms" (Korte 1997).[58] The show is able to mix slapstick and visual gags with real emotion which is exemplified in the season seven episode "Mother Simpson" where Homer's mother (whom Homer thought was dead) returns for a brief time, only to leave again at the end of the episode. The final scene features Homer saying goodbye to his mother and sitting alone while the sun sets and soft music plays. This ability to vary the level of comedy and raise more emotive, serious issues is one of the reasons why the show has maintained its success, "you have to start with great writing, and keep in mind that on the networks...the foundation for the series should probably be a family" (Clifton in Strike 2003 p.5). *The Simpsons* has clearly adopted this formula and developed a highly successful anicom.

The 'constructed reality', created originally for the lead characters (Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie), has grown significantly since the show's

[58] From 'The Simpsons Archive' http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/dk.paper.html

inception as a series to include a large number of other regular characters within the Springfield community. This secondary ensemble cast is larger than in the standard sitcom. Though there have been earlier examples such as *M*A*S*H* and *Top Cat*, these were fairly unusual in their use of large ensemble casts. The majority of sitcoms, both live action and animated still generally conform to the average grouping of five. (Grote 1983 p.80)

The Simpsons humour is derived from physical comedy, a mixture of slapstick and visual gags, as well as satirical references to American culture, both popular and political. *The Simpsons* began its fourteenth season in 2003, making it one of the longest running comedy series on television. The show is subject to further discussion in the final section of the chapter in an examination of the relationship between the shows fans and producers. The show's success and overwhelming acceptance by such a large, and dedicated audience is typical of the new 'breed' of anicom produced to the adult audience who originally enjoyed the Hanna Barbera anicoms, and other animated series in their youth. This reinforces Sedelmaier's comments from the previous chapter which suggested the children of the 'baby boomer' or 'gen Xer' were looking for new forms of entertainment.

The 1990s – Re-emergence of the anicom.

I have argued that *The Simpsons* is the most important anicom of the 1990s, in terms of commercial success and in the development and reacceptance of the anicom.

Following the success of *The Simpsons* two of the big television networks, FOX and ABC, commissioned a number of animated series in an attempt to capitalise

on the anicoms success with an adult audience. Shows such as, *The Critic*, *The Tick* and *Duckman* initially enjoyed high ratings although none could sustain the same level of success as *The Simpsons*.

The Critic was a spin off[59] from *The Simpsons* and began its series in January 1994 on the ABC network, the first network to broadcast animation in prime time with *The Flintstones* in 1961. After the first short season (13 episodes), the show was picked up by FOX, the home of *The Simpsons*. The show conformed to the generic conventions of the sitcom in terms of narrative structure, but the situation itself was varied, divided between domestic and workplace. The show centred on Jay Sherman, a movie critic and essentially followed his life from his home with his son, visiting his parent's home, having dinner with his friend, to Jay at work, presenting his movie review television show. Focusing on the life of a movie critic provided the narrative motivation for numerous movie parodies. Each episode features Jay's review of a movie, in most cases a sequel to an existing movie in which the title or plot is juxtaposed with another title which is completely different, or inappropriate for the genre, one such example 'Honey I ate the Kids!' is a 'sequel' to the popular Disney film *Honey I Shrunk the Kids*. However, the format allowed little scope for variety in the storylines to satisfy audiences, and it was cancelled after the second season, after only 23 episodes in total. In 2004 the show was re-run on cable network, Comedy Central in a late night Sunday evening slot.

The Tick and *Duckman* took different approaches to the sitcom genre. *The Tick,* based on a comic book, was essentially a domestic sitcom but the stereotypical

[59] Creators of *The Critic*, Al Jean and Mike Reiss were producers and writers on *The Simpsons*. Both shows are produced by James L. Brooks. *The Simpsons* featured a crossover when *Critic* 'star' Jay Sherman featured in episode 'A Star is Burns'.

family characters were formed by a group of 'superheroes'. The animation enabled the fantastic elements of the superhero genre to be reproduced easily (Wells 2002a p.87). The main characters 'attempted' to fight crime (they were fairly inept), but the show was centred in one of the main character's apartment. *The Tick* aired on the Fox Children's Network for three seasons (36 episodes) from 1994 to 1996. The show was broadcast on a children's channel despite a cult 'adult' following for the comic book on which the series was based. The writer of the show Ben Edlund admits that the content had to be altered slightly in the transition from page to screen for the younger audience, "A few of the darker characters were removed, as well as some of the sexual undertones" (Reber 1997 p.12). The show was marketed by FOX for children, despite the adult comedy and adult appeal. After 36 episodes the show was cancelled, however *The Tick* was re-run on Comedy Central for a time (though is no longer in their schedule) continuing the tradition of the cable network's support for the anicom, particularly those which are cancelled by networks (this practise will be discussed throughout this chapter). A live action version of the show was commissioned for Fox in 2001 starring Patrick Warburton, of popular sitcom *Seinfeld*, as the title character. The live action version of the show was more clearly marketed for an adult audience, noticeable in its inclusion of swearing, previously absent in the animated version however the live action show was cancelled after eight episodes suggesting that it was not the superhero concept of *The Tick* which made it so popular in its animated, and comic book, form.

Duckman was the most successful of these three shows, lasting four seasons from 1994 until 1997 (70 episodes). The show aired on the cable network USA for its entire run. The show was markedly different from its contemporaries with its use

of humanised animals as the main characters, in a return to traditional cartoon animation shorts and the anicoms produced by Hanna Barbera in the 1960s and 1970s. The comedy was extremely adult in nature, in terms of language and strong sexual references, and always scheduled for an adult audience. After cancellation it was picked up by Comedy Central, where it continues to be re-run in a late night slot. The cable network provides a home for anicoms which have been popular with audiences, but which network television has cancelled.

The all cartoon cable channel Cartoon Network also provides cancelled anicoms and other animation forms with a 'home' in its dedicated adult slot 'Adult Swim'. The 1980s case study chapter's examination of the decline of the anicom suggested that cable television was a potential contributor to this decline, as it created competition for the 'big' networks. However throughout the 1990s cable has proved to be something of a saviour for the anicom, particularly shows like *Duckman* which, in my opinion was probably too 'adult' for primetime network television which still tries to maintain a family audience. The scheduling of a show affects the generic expectations of the audience and as such can affect its success. With the cancellation of these shows it appeared that the renewed interest in the animated sitcom would follow the same pattern as in the 1960s, with a short lived boom of the anicom. The 1990s anicoms success in prime time would not be as short lived as their earlier counterparts; however it seems that when a small number of shows are successful, the market becomes saturated with too many shows of the same genre and ultimately some of them fail. The live action sitcom also faces this problem, but with the genre so well established on network television, there are more opportunities for new shows.

Dr Katz, Professional Therapist

Throughout the early 1990s, *The Simpsons* maintained its hold as the most successful prime time network anicom. By 1995 the networks had dropped *The Critic* and rescheduled *The Tick* into a children's slot. The cable channels, and in particular Comedy Central, were becoming the main broadcasters of animated sitcom. In 1995 a new show, *Dr Katz, Professional Therapist*, aired which appeared to be quite different from any sitcom, animated or live action, which had previously been broadcast. Tom Snyder, former programmer of educational software had found some success using animation and decided to experiment with an idea he had for a short featuring a psychiatrist and his son Schatz 2000). Live action sitcom *Frasier* (1993), spin off from the long running sitcom *Cheers*, had premiered two years earlier, following the same format of a psychiatrist and his family. Both shows feature a father and son living together, however in Frasier the title character's father lives with him, but in Dr Katz the situation is reversed with Katz still supporting his twenty something son. The family dynamics are different and the animated series places more emphasis on the patients than its live action counterpart.

Cable network, Comedy Central, supported the idea, and after advising Snyder to include some known voice actors (last seen in the anicom in *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* with actor Tom Bosley), picked up the show which was developed into a half hour sitcom format. The show first aired in May 1995, and ran until December 1999. Dividing its situation between domestic and workplace, *Dr Katz* focuses on the life of the titular Dr. His home life is shared with his son Ben, a young adult who has not yet found a vocation. The other half of Katz's time (and the episode) is spent at his office treating his patients,

interacting with his secretary Laura, and the occasional meeting with friends in a local bar. These situations reflect the range of traditional live action sitcom settings, though, rather than focusing on one, particular setting, such as the bar in *Cheers* (1982), here all three are utilised. This use of multiple settings becomes more frequent in the sitcom in the 1990s, in both live action and animated, focusing on a core character group rather than one specific place.

Dr Katz, like its anicom predecessors was scheduled in a night time slot (10pm - as opposed to the earlier prime time) and follows a half hour sitcom narrative structure. However what immediately marks *Dr Katz* out from its predecessors, and indeed shows that followed, is both the style of animation and style of comedy. The animation method used in all of the anicoms discussed in the previous case studies have been produced using cel animation, though in the case of Hanna Barbera, in a 'limited' form.

The animation in *Dr Katz* is very different from its contemporary anicoms. Known as 'Squigglevision' the lines around the characters seem to constantly move as though they are 'wobbling'. Tom Snyder created the process through his experience in computer programming work in educational software and is under his trademark. The process creates a sense of movement when there is actually none, and provides the show with a unique look which sets it apart from its counterparts. As well as the use of Squigglevision, *Dr Katz* also featured another unique production element, 'Retroscripting'. This technique is also trademarked by Tom Synder Productions. Rather than completely scripting episodes and having the voice actors read to the animation, they were only given a plot outline and then improvised the dialogue. The characters were then

animated afterwards to follow the dialogue. This allowed more potential for improvisational comedy, a move away from the various forms of comedy seen in previous situation comedies, animated and live action, and one that is centred more on dialogue rather than slapstick or parody.

The use of Retroscripting was ideally suited to the show as most of the cast comprised of stand up comedians for whom improvisation was a central feature of their shows. Comic Jonathan Katz played the title character of the psychiatrist, who is divorced and lives with his grown up son, Ben. Most of his patients are stand ups using part of their stage routine as the discussion of their problems. Occasionally, the patient will be a celebrity guest, an actor playing themselves (as used in *The Simpsons*), rather than a comedian. Most of the comics are perhaps better known in the US than they are in Britain but the comedy is still successful for a UK audience as they tend to focus on observational comedy. As well as the variety of comics as patients, there are two main recurring characters, Stan and Julie. Julie is a bartender in the bar where Katz goes after work and the secret object of his affection, and Stan is a friend and bar regular. Katz often goes there to discuss the issue or situation that he is going through in a particular episode.

As in most sitcoms there is always a particular event or 'ritual error' which occurs during the episode and is generally resolved by the end (Grote 1983 p.61). In the case of *Dr Katz*, there is a common structure which each episode follows and only occasionally deviates from. Each episode begins with Ben and Katz at home, usually breakfast time discussing something, the subject of this discussion

then becomes the plot of the episode. For example in 'Closets',[60] the show starts at breakfast time where Ben and Katz discuss their storage and closet needs. This theme of closet needs becomes the event, or situation for the episode. The ritual error occurs when Ben attempts to resolve or deal with the situation. The episode then moves to Katz's office where we meet our first patient or 'guest', comedienne Elaine Boosler.

Like most sitcoms with more than one location or story arc within an episode, there is a common sequence of locations in the episode. In this case Katz usually starts his working day either with interaction with Laura, or by introducing the first patient. Throughout Katz's day at work he also has a number of phone conversations with Ben, as does Laura. These phone calls from Ben enable the plot to progress as he explains his attempts to organise their closets. Likewise Katz's frequent visits to the bar to see his friends Stan and Julie (the barmaid) and the discussions he has with his friends enable him to progress the resolution of the error or event by explaining the situation, often seeking advice.

In the next scene we meet the second patient of the episode, Mike Rowe (there are usually two patients, though occasionally three). The patient is initially talking to Laura, but then cuts to the session in progress. The sessions feature the patients telling Dr Katz their problems and these are illustrated with accompanying animation to visualise their story. In this episode Elaine discusses how she feels about over enthusiastic pet owners and Mike talks about his relationship with his family, and how he feels about being bald. The use of

[60] Original air date: 10 August 1997

observational comedy that deals with general subjects, rather than specific contemporary cultural references enables the show to be re-run in syndication without being dated by its references as we saw in the earlier chapter with *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home*. The experiences the 'patients' refer to are fairly common, the condition of hair loss for example, rather than specific cultural references to politics or contemporary figures. This ability to show what someone is describing is fairly unique to the anicom, as often the animation is used to illustrate fantasy situations which would be too costly, dangerous or otherwise impractical to film in live action (Wells 2002a p.97).

The episode then follows a series of cuts between further phone calls between Katz and Ben and then Ben and Laura, as well as the remaining patient sessions. Back at home Ben and Katz discuss their new closets which were installed by the company Ben hired, however the closets are unsuitable as they have too many small compartments. Here the original situation has been resolved, the closets are indeed organised, though the outcome was not entirely satisfactory, the equilibrium is restored (Marc 1997 p.190). Though there has been a resolution to the original situation, there is usually another last scene back in the office (where the show usually ends). Resolving the patient's problems, or in the case of the comedians, the punch line of their 'gags'. The episode ends, as it usually does with the signature music being played and Dr Katz announcing to the patient that their time is up. This return to the earlier patient or scene is frequently used in the show in an interesting play with the chronology of the episode.

The time doesn't appear to be linear as we often see the patient in session with Dr Katz, then in a later scene we see them talking to Laura as though they had just

arrived. It is unclear whether this is supposed to be the same day or not. This confusion of time also occurs with the bar scenes, it is unclear what time of day it is supposed to be. Despite the occasional confusion of time, it does not detract from the plots or comedy of the show, indeed this use of time, combined with the use of Retroscripting demonstrates the generic innovation within *Dr Katz*.

An initial examination suggests that the narrative structure is more complex than some other sitcoms with its un-sitcom like use of space and time, the focus on Dr Katz provides the order to the show. Where the scenes in *Dr Katz* are cut between phone calls, patients and home life, other sitcoms will follow the multiple threads which feature other characters in the ensemble. The live action sitcom *Friends* provides an example of this, with six main characters, all featuring in some part of each episode either individually or together. Following the exploits of each character creates nearly as many scenes as *Dr Katz*. Likewise *The Simpsons* makes use of the ensemble cast by following a variety of plot threads throughout an episode, though the focus always returns to the Simpson family.

Unlike the anicoms of the 1960s, and like *The Simpsons* and the other series in the new anicom cycle, Dr Katz does not use laughter tracks. This generic development suggests a shift away from the requirement to make the audience 'participate' as part of a 'larger audience' (Grote 1983 p.66).

In the next two episodes in the case study, 'The Waltz'[61] and 'Ben's Partay'[62] the structure of the episode is largely like the ones described above. However in the

[61] O.A.D: 5 October 1998
[62] O.A.D: 13 July 1999

case of 'The Waltz', a new location, the video store is introduced with a new character, the clerk, 'Todd' who works there. This adds another dimension to Ben's character as he now has another person to interact with taking some of the focus off Katz.

In 'Ben's Partay', the structure is the same as usual, with the exception of the final scene which ends at the apartment. And the phone calls between Ben and Katz are from home to the mall, rather than to the office. Much more time is spent away from the office in this episode. This may be an unusual use of this type of ending away from the adopted format, or a change in style in the last season, however it does not appear to have the same element of closure as the episodes which end with the patient sessions.

The structure of *Dr Katz* does conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom in terms of narrative, though this show does have more interruptions in the narrative with frequent scene cuts. This is usually facilitated by the use of exterior 'establishing shots' of the office building or apartment and the use of incidental music over these sections which provide the 'flow' between the scenes.

The show is scheduled and marketed as a night time animated series, though as we have seen the institutional discourse acknowledges the animated comedy series as an adult form, though stops short of classifying the shows with the live action sitcoms. This classification has largely been theoretical, as evidenced by

the recent literature on the subject[63], and of my own findings throughout this thesis.

Where the show differs from the previous anicoms is in the style and type of comedy used. The observational, conversational comedy, as opposed to cultural reference, parody and slapstick seen in shows such as *The Simpsons* or *The Critic* provide the viewer with a different kind of show. The animation of the show itself and the use of animated 'dream' or fantasy sequences during the patient's sessions add an element to the comedy which would be difficult to reproduce in a live action sitcom.

The unusual format and content of *Dr Katz* makes possible the innovation within the genre format which provides generic difference and enables the progression of the genre which both Neale (2000 p.56) and Born (1993 p.232) have suggested is so vital to the survival of a long running genre, such as the situation comedy.

During its run the show's popularity with audiences was recognised with the show winning a prestigious 'Emmy' award.[64] After 6 seasons, (81 episodes) *Dr Katz* was cancelled, a respectable length for a sitcom, live action or animated. I would attribute this success to the generic innovation of the show which led to Tom Snyder Productions producing a new anicom called *Home Movies,* as soon as Dr *Katz* finished (*Home Movies* will be discussed later in this chapter).

After the initial peak in the popularity of the anicom, the market appeared to be in decline, as it had in the 1960s. By 1997 there were only two anicoms left on

[63] The animated series is discussed in terms of the sitcom by Paul Wells in *Animation and America.* (2002a)
[64] Jonathan Katz won an Emmy award in 1995 for Dr. Katz in the Outstanding Voice-Over Performance category. http://www.emmys.tv/index.htm

the air, *The Simpsons* and *Dr Katz*. However despite this apparent decline, and unlike the 1960s, there was to be another increase in the number of anicoms being produced and broadcast.

King of the Hill

In 1993 MTV aired a series of animated shorts created by Mike Judge and produced by animator J.J. Sedelmaier. *Beavis and Butt-Head* was an adult animated comedy which featured two adolescent males, and followed their attempts to avoid school and pick up girls. These situations were interspersed with live action music videos which the pair critiqued, generally suggesting that the 'heavy metal' videos were 'cool' and that pop videos 'sucked'. The pair were established as anti-heroes, neither attractive nor successful in any way, radically different to the stereotypical sitcom heroes seen previously. Like *Dr Katz* the animation style reflected its difference from other anicoms. The show was cel animated but the drawings were fairly 'crude', with more emphasis on the comedy dialogue than 'cartoon' style.

The show was important to the development of television animation as it encouraged acceptance by an adult audience. *The Simpsons* had already created a renewed interest in the anicom by audiences (adults and children), and arguably in animation as a whole, however *Beavis and Butthead* took the interest further with its more obvious adult humour. For the first time since *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* there was an animated series made for an (and scheduled for) adult audience. The increasing interest from adults demonstrated that there was indeed a market for animated series of this type and the success of *Beavis and Butthead* (as well as *The Simpsons*) undoubtedly led to the increase of the

anicom in the 1990s. The 'gross out' adolescent humour, scheduling in a late night slot and on a cable channel, MTV, which catered for young adults guaranteed the series success even spawning a spin off theatrical release[65], though this was less successful. However the show will not be included in the case study as the structure of the show does not conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom. The episodes did not follow the narrative structure of the sitcom, the shows took the format of 'skits' linked by the couch scenes when the pair watched the videos, with no particular 'situation' or plot structure occurring.

The show was broadcast two years before *Dr Katz*, but is included here due to the influential nature of the show which supported the notion of animation as a medium for adults, advancing the form with audiences. It also established Mike Judge as a bankable animator and director, leading to the creation of a new animated series, *King of the Hill.* The show premiered on the Fox network in January 1997 and is scheduled on Sunday at 7.30 p.m. as part of a highly successful line up of Sunday night anicoms on Fox, along with *The Simpsons* and until recently *Family Guy* (discussed in later in this chapter).

King of the Hill follows the Hill family who live in Arlen, Texas, Judge's home state. The show's situation is a family domestic sitcom with the focus on the father, Hank Hill, a propane salesman (which he proudly tells everyone) and his wife, Peggy a substitute teacher. They have a son, Bobby and a pet dog. Early in the first series, niece Luanne was introduced and moved into the household. This created a balance in the ratio of male to female characters and a foil and ally

[65] *Beavis and Butthead do America* (1996) Mike Judge Dir.

for Bobby (Grote 1983 p.72) as well as an ally for Peggy. There are a number of other characters which feature frequently including their neighbours, and Hank's friends. Hank spends a much of his free time in the alley beside his house drinking beer with his friends, Dale, Bill and Boomhauer. These peripheral characters provide a different type of comedy; they are more prone to slapstick behaviour, representing some of the stereotypical sitcom characters of the fool and the innocent (Grote 1983), whereas Hank and Peggy provide a darker and more observational humour. (The characterisation in the shows will be discussed further later in the chapter)

Like its 1990s anicom counterparts, the show does not use canned laughter, but unlike many domestic sitcoms, like *The Simpsons* which combine slapstick gags with comedy dialogue, the humour of *King of The Hill* takes the more subtle form of observational comedy (similar to *Dr Katz*), and is therefore unlike *Beavis and Butt-Head*. The animation itself is quite different to *Beavis and Butt-Head* and indeed other anicoms, with the drawing having something of a 'realist' quality. Returning to Corner's discussion of the 'project of verisimilitude' as realism being 'about the real', or 'like the real' (1998 p. 70) we see that the animation in *King of The Hill*, while still drawn, is more 'like the real' than its anicom counterparts.

The show is largely character driven, and often times does not feature the resolution of a problem, or the restoration of the equilibrium at the end of an episode with the problem, or 'ritual error' often carrying over to another episode, or occasionally into another season. The show then becomes more like a serial than a situation comedy. This is the case in the season three finale, 'As Old as

the Hills'[66]. In an attempt to 'spice' up their life, after reflecting on their marriage at an anniversary party, Hank and Peggy decide to try skydiving. The episode ends with a dramatic cliff-hanger, Hank manages the jump successfully, but Peggy falls to the ground when her parachute fails to open, the conclusion of which is continued in the next season. The follow up episode at the start of season four continues the story; Peggy is taken to hospital and ends up in a full body cast for a number of episodes.

The following episode, 'Cotton's Plot'[67]; continues the story of Peggy's recovery, aided by Hank's father, Cotton. Though he has always openly disliked her, Cotton helps Peggy to take control of her recovery by ordering her around like a drill sergeant. This episode develops the relationship between Cotton and Peggy through a subplot featuring Cotton's attempts to persuade the local Army veteran's association to allocate him a grave plot in the veteran's area of the cemetery. While he is training Peggy, he recounts his war stories, giving Peggy and insight into his personality. While Peggy's situation is still unresolved, the subplot featuring Cotton is resolved. Like most sitcoms the episodes usually feature a subplot which runs in tandem with the main plot, or arc, in the episode. These subplots are rarely continued throughout the series, though they are usually resolved in the episode.

The episode continues the ideological conflict between Peggy and Cotton which has been alluded to in earlier episodes. Like *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* the conflicts between characters are highly ideological and are resolved through a compromise, or truce rather than an agreement of issues. This type of conflict

[66] O.A.D: 18 May 1999
[67] O.A.D: 3 October 1999

also occurs between Hank and Bobby, usually concerning Bobby's choices which Hank disagrees with, and occasionally with Hank and Luanne. While generational conflict is common to the sitcom, in *King of the Hill* the conflicts between generations deal with more serious issues than staying out late. For example in episode 18 'Husky Bobby' Hank and Bobby disagree when Bobby wants to be a model for a clothing store which caters to larger children, Hank is embarrassed by the idea of Bobby modelling and the episode, and conflict, is resolved when Hank forcibly removes Bobby from a fashion show. The conflict resolution does not lead to agreement but Bobby is pleased when he finds out that his father saved him from humiliation as a gang attacked the remaining models by throwing food at them.

Hank and Peggy also engage in ideological conflict in a number of episodes, most of which focus on Peggy's job, or ambitions. Unlike Marge Simpson, Peggy Hill is a strong character, who will support her husband and family but not at the expense of her ideals.

In the episode, 'A Beer Can Named Desire'[68] the situation is set up with Hank, and his friends standing in the alley drinking beer, however this time there is a specific purpose to the drinking. In one marked can of 'Alamo' beer is a winning opportunity to throw a football to win $1m, or have a football star throw it for you for $100,000 instead. Hank wins and decides to try his hand at throwing himself for the million. After much practise the family sets of to New Orleans for the game, allowing Bill to tag along and rediscover his Cajun roots, in this episode's sub plot. Though the show does not feature celebrity guest stars

[68] O.A.D: 14 November 1999

providing voices as often as *The Simpsons*, *King of the Hill* does include them occasionally. In most cases they play themselves, and in this episode football player Don Meredith is the star who will take the kick at the game if Hank decides to go for the smaller cash prize.

The final episode in the case study focuses on Peggy, and continues a theme which has featured in previous episodes earlier in the series. Hank's friend Bill has always had a crush on Peggy, and in 'Bill of Sales,'[69] Peggy uses it to her advantage when she finds out what a good salesman he is. After her previous venture into business ownership failed, Peggy is inspired to join a 'Pyramid scheme', but is poor at delivering the sales quotas she needs to succeed. In an attempt to impress Peggy, Bill helps out revealing a hidden talent. Their friendship grows, but Bill is unsettled and Hank reminds Peggy, in one of his few scenes of this episode, that Bill is only used to being treated badly. She proceeds to do so and in the end quits the scheme, retaining the element of friendship which they had at the start of the episode. Equilibrium is thus restored, demonstrating that while not every episode follows the same narrative structure, some have cliff-hanger endings, the series as a whole does conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom. The subject in this episode, particularly the abusive, derogatory treatment which Bill is used to (and even responds best to), as with most of this show, is of a fairly serious nature with a complexity which is far more subtle than most live action sitcoms or anicoms. The issues such as religion and politics are of a serious nature but are raised without derision as each character represents a different viewpoint without one being perceived as better than another. It is this subtle comedy which proves to be so successful.

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[69] O.A.D: 12 March 2000

Though only briefly mentioned in this case study, the cultural and social references in the show to such issues as politics and religion occur throughout the series as evidence of the cultural verisimilitude inherent in the sitcom. The comedy is less 'gag' oriented than other anicoms and more dialogue based, however this only seeks to develop and progress the genre. The inclusion of serious issues and ideological conflicts (and the compromise in resolution) such as Dale's conspiracy theories and militia membership, the representation of Texas and President(s) Bush, the underachieving attitude of Bobby and the strength of Luanne's religious beliefs, verging on the fanatical all provide the show with the opportunity to address issues with a subtlety unseen in most sitcoms. The political and cultural ideology of the 1970s visible in *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home,* was represented in particular through the fanaticism of Ralph. The character was an obvious caricature of the extremist views of the era, however his counterpart in *King of the Hill,* Dale is never ridiculed to the same extent. He is treated more sympathetically by the other characters and particularly Hank. The show's continuing success on the Fox network demonstrates the variation possible within the genre of anicom as well as the audience's continued interest in the form.

South Park

While the Fox network continued its support of the anicom, airing *King of the Hill* and continuing *The Simpsons*, cable network Comedy Central became its main competitor in the anicom market. With the success of *Dr Katz*, and previous success with *Duckman*, the channel broadcast a new animated series in 1997. *South Park* first aired in August 1997 and currently airs on Comedy Central on Wednesdays at 10p.m. Unlike its anicom counterparts, *South Park* is

not broadcast in a prime time slot, but in an evening slot due to the adult nature of the comedy. The creators explicitly state that this show is not suitable for children and even include a disclaimer at the start of the credit sequence each week, though this forms part of a gag by saying that the show is not actually suitable for anyone.

South Park originated as an animated short film made as a web Christmas card which, after achieving a great deal of interest from television executives was developed into a full-length sitcom format. Creators Trey Parker and Matt Stone, who also voice many of the characters, produced an anicom like no other in production at the time. The animation has the appearance of crudely cut out paper figures, in the style of something a child might produce as opposed to the traditional cel style used in other anicoms (with the notable exception of *Dr Katz*), which complements the themes and humour of the show. Initial observations of the show, with four school children as central characters, gives the impression of something childlike, however the animation and humour, as well as the themes and plots of the show are revealed (through my case studies) to be far more sophisticated. The animation is produced digitally, though designed to have a distinctly hand made appearance.

The show features eight-year-old Stan, Kyle, Cartman and Kenny (All voiced by Trey Parker and Matt Stone) and their relationships with each other and their families. Best friends Stan and Kyle often join forces against Cartman, a rather overweight kid who seems to hang around with the others despite his constant attacks on them, Kenny usually joins with Cartman. The four tend to argue a lot, generally picking on how fat Cartman is or how poor Kenny's family is.

While the show focuses on the four main characters there are a number of other secondary characters that feature in the episodes. Like *The Simpsons* there is a town full of people, with some key characters featuring more than others. The boys have an ally in the school chef named, Chef. Singer Isaac Hayes, well known for signing the theme song to 1970s blaxploitation movie *Shaft*,[70] as well as his numerous albums and film appearances, voices the character[71] providing the show with a well known personality. We have already seen this in earlier anicoms such as Tom Bosely in *Wait 'Till Your Father Gets Home* and Jonathan Katz in *Dr Katz*. Chef always gives the children advice, though often inappropriate, as we learn that Chef, much like Shaft, is a notorious womaniser and his advice always comes in the form of a song (similar to Hayes earlier soul music). This then degenerates into tips on how to seduce women. The other key characters at school, one of the main settings for the show, is the boys' teacher, Mr. Garrison, who teaches with the aid of a seemingly gay puppet named Mr. Hat, and the school counsellor Mr. Mackey, who always tells the children how bad everything is for them.

The structure of the show is that of a live action sitcom narrative, using the device of a particular location, or setting which becomes the place where the situation of the episode is set up and resolved. In the case of *South Park* the school bus stop is used. The boys discuss problems or situations which become the plot for the episode. Upon resolution of the situation and restoration of the equilibrium, the characters return to the bus stop, often commenting on the events which preceded. A variation of this device however is in the end of each

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[70] *Shaft* (1971) Gordon Parks Dir.
[71] According to the Internet movie database entry for Isaac Hayes, Chef's full name is Jerome 'Chef' McElroy. www.imdb.com

episode, when there are only three children as one of the four, Kenny, is killed off in an amusing 'cartoon' death in each episode. This references the classic animated shorts by Warner Bros. (such as the *Roadrunner* shorts) featuring characters dying in elaborate ways, then being unhurt in the next scene. The death itself becomes a running joke with more elaborate deaths each week, though in one episode Kenny actually lives through the episode. This highlights the shows self awareness of its animatedness, a particular feature of animation (Wells 1998a p.245n) while at the same time subverting the generic verisimilitude and continuity of the sitcom. The series overall still conforms to the structural conventions however, by returning the character in the next episode, restoring the equilibrium.

The general themes of the episodes are fairly diverse, and often political. They range from such issues as euthanasia, censorship, religion and drug use to globalisation. These issues are examined using the device of the innocence of the children who question the, to them odd and often illogical rules which the adults in their town are governed by. This allows the creators to address controversial stories such as drug use or euthanasia, but as we saw in *King of the Hill* with a more subtle approach than many sitcoms, though *South Park* is not as subtle as its contemporary.

Visitors and zombies

In the first episode, entitled 'Cartman Gets an Anal Probe' [72] virtually every character in town is introduced from the principals to supporting characters. The general structure is set up for the rest of the series with the first scene showing

[72] Original air date: 18 August 1997

the four boys waiting for the school bus. Cartman is describing the 'dream' he had to the other boys, in which he was abducted by aliens. Like *Dr Katz* the dream is illustrated in animated form, which helps the audience and the boys conclude that he was in fact taken by 'visitors'.

This episode is a satire of the many alien abduction stories originating in small town America, made popular in the supermarket tabloid. All of the stereotypical features of alien appearances are included, as well as their desire to 'probe' people and mutilate cattle. At one point we see Cartman watching a television news program reporting on sightings of crop circles, which when we see them look distinctly like Cartman, whom the children believe is the alien's communication tool. We later find out that the cattle mutilation was an accident by one of the aliens who is the 'new guy' and they have actually found that cows are the most intelligent of all the species on earth. Excited by the prospect by an actual encounter with the 'visitors', Chef has a party to celebrate their arrival, and then uses it as an excuse to entertain some 'ladies'.

Chef's character as a womaniser is established here, as is the fact that he watches the 1970s sitcom *Sanford and Son*.[73] The sitcom was produced in the same era as *Shaft*, and much of the décor in Chef's house is in the style of the 1970s, thus providing an insight into Chef's character, as well as a reference to the voice actor playing him. Other TV references occur throughout the series, often as a side comment mentioning a particular actor or show, though generally not as many as in other 1990s anicoms.

[73] *Sanford and Son* (1972-77) NBC

Though the characters often use mild swear words throughout this episode and the series, in one scene Kyle begins to swear and shout at the aliens. We can only assume that the words used here are rather more offensive than usual as they have been censored with bleeps. This is part of the comedy, with the characters that swear the most being the boys who are only eight years old. As previously discussed the 'innocence' of the children is used as a device to address issues, such as violence or swearing on television.[74] Ironically it is the use of swearing in the show to highlight the issue that has created the very controversy it critiques. A number of parent groups have been involved over the years since the show started, in campaigning against the content which they have deemed as unsuitable for children. In my opinion these groups are failing to engage with the fact that the show is blatantly adult, due to its content, and more obviously as suggested by its scheduling in a late night slot far removed from the more children friendly prime time slot.

The season one episode, 'Pinkeye', which aired on 29 October 1997, was the first of the holiday specials Parker and Stone would produce for the series. In this case it is Halloween and begins, as usual, at the bus stop with the children discussing their costumes for the school contest. Kenny's death occurs early on in this episode, with him being squashed by the MIR space station as it falls out of the sky. When Kenny is taken to the morgue, he is accidentally turned into a zombie, which leads to the main plot with most of the town being over run by zombies, which the town doctor keeps diagnosing as 'pinkeye'. At school all the kids have come dressed as Chewbacca from *Star Wars*, except Stan who is Raggedy Andy (originally planned to be a team with Wendy) and Cartman who

[74] Episode 502, 'It hits the Fan', O.A.D 20/6/2001, features the word 'shit' 162 times without network censors. www.southparkstudios.com

is dressed as Hitler. Cartman gets in trouble and is given a ghost costume by the principal but looks more like a Ku Klux Klan member. In the end the boys find a cure and the town is saved, except for the people that turned into zombies who the boys cut to pieces with chainsaws. The zombie plot references a number of horror films namely *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and in particular *The Evil Dead* (1981) with the use of the chainsaws. However this being a special episode in the series, none of the events has any effect on later episodes.

As well as the film references there are several others which feature in this episode, including Mr Garrison discussing in class the 'famous horror writer' Jackie Collins, who actually writes romance novels. One of the classroom's Halloween decorations is a poster of former US President Richard Nixon. In a parody of the famous Michael Jackson music video *Thriller* (1983), when Chef turns into a zombie he does a song and dance routine dressed like Michael Jackson but Chef's song is, of course about women. The final scene in the episode is of Kenny's grave, in a parody of the horror movie *Carrie*, Kenny's hand bursts out of the soil but unlike the film, a gravestone falls on him and kills him once and for all, at least in this episode, as the equilibrium will be restored at the start of the next episode, with Kenny alive.

Friendship and family

The second holiday special, again in season one, is 'Starvin Marvin' which aired on 19 November 1997, for Thanksgiving. While watching television the boys learn of the plight of the starving 'eithernopians' in a parody of charity aid appeals, and that if they sponsor one they will get a free sports watch. In a mix-up an Ethiopian child is sent instead of the watch. In the meantime, in an *Island*

of Doctor Moreau[75] parody, genetically engineered turkeys have escaped from the lab and are on the rampage in the town attacking people. Chef mounts an army and defeats the turkeys, highlighting the risks involved in genetic engineering, while Cartman learns a tough lesson about the needy. The commercial break with the Ethiopian charity plea is on while the boys are watching the 'Terence and Philip Thanksgiving Special', which consists entirely of fart jokes. This is something that the show has been accused of many times, and Parker and Stone satirise often.

The most notable television or movie reference in this episode is to the main battle scene in *Braveheart* when Mel Gibson addresses the troops; he has his face painted in the colours of the Scottish flag. In this case it is Chef who is addressing the 'troops' and he has his face painted, likewise the turkeys have amassed, ready to do battle with the lead turkey's face painted in blue and white.

In 'Ike's Wee Wee' [76], Kyle's relationship with his little brother is developed further. Discovering that Ike is to have a Briss, the boys discuss the matter with Chef and, though he doesn't explain the Jewish tradition behind the ceremony, he gives them the general idea of circumcision. Horrified the boys plot to stop it at all costs. They send Ike away to Nebraska to protect him. Kyle uses a dummy of Ike to fool his parents, but it is made of bones and is attacked by a dog. After dummy Ike's funeral, Kyle finds out that his brother was actually adopted. Annoyed that he spent so much time protecting someone who wasn't even a blood relation, Kyle reveals what really happened. After his parents return with Ike, Kyle learns the 'true meaning' of having a brother, as well as the 'true

[75] The H.G. Wells (1896) book in which a 'mad scientist' experiments with animals and humans. The book has inspired a number of film versions.
[76] Original air date 20 May 1998

meaning' of a Briss. Like most of the other episode, the boys have learned a moral lesson by the end of the episode, usually accompanied by the phrase, 'I've learned something today…' parodying the moralistic messages inserted into the end of cartoons shown in the US in the 1980s. (Burke 1999 p.161)

In the sub plot, school councillor Mr Mackey turns to drugs after he loses his job. In order to demonstrate the evils of drugs, and to familiarise the children with the smell of marijuana, he passes some round the class. When it goes missing (stolen by Mr Garrison who we later see smoking it at home) he is fired for giving the children drugs. The whole town turns against him and he ends up on the streets. We see his progression from soft to hard drugs resulting in his trip to India with his girlfriend. Finally happy (and not actually doing drugs anymore), Mr Mackey objects when the *A Team* 'rescues' him.[77] The townspeople put him in rehab, and in the end we see him, re-instated and back to his old uptight self, repeating the mindless mantra 'drugs are bad'. The parody of anti-drug campaigns is clear with repeated speeches with no supporting arguments or reasons why 'drugs are bad'.

South Park's comedy is a mixture of parody and cultural references and is quite different from the observational comedy of *Dr Katz* or the combination of slapstick and sight gags in *The Simpsons*. As previously discussed, *South Park's* inclusion of a number of controversial issues suggest a level of sophistication, different from its anicom counterparts, however the issues lack the subtlety of *King of the Hill,* with a more transparent critique of the politics it addresses.

[77] A reference to the 1980s television show about a renegade group who travel around the country in their van helping people in need.

The humour, is often a combination of childish 'toilet' jokes, and generally highly sophisticated social satire, adult in nature. However the childlike appearance of the animation, the fact that the central characters are school children, merchandising tie-ins and the general history of animated cartoons with a general assumption of their target audience, seems to make it difficult for some people to understand a show of this type. As previously suggested, this is evident through the great deal of controversy which has surrounded the show, with the creators, and home channel, coming under fire with accusations of inclusion of offensive material, in both the content and delivery of the subjects of each episode. Most of this is media driven[78] and has done little to affect the success of the show which is now in its seventh season, and produced a feature film, which had a highly successful theatrical release.[79]

The show conforms to the generic conventions of the sitcom, however the level of humour and the language used categorise the show further as 'adult'. Most live action sitcoms are produced for the prime time slot (with the exception of *Dr Katz*), however due to the unsuitable nature of the show, it is scheduled in a late night slot (9.30/10pm). This use of scheduling suggests a difference from its anicom counterparts. Despite its apparent generic status the show is marketed to a different audience from the prime time audiences of *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill* and as such classified by the institution, and audience, specifically as an adult animated series. However I would suggest that the pushing of boundaries and levels of acceptance is part of the genre progression, of the type seen in the 1970s with the broadcast of *All in the Family*. This show was considered highly

[78] Parental groups such as Parents' Television Council lobby the media and networks against the show. (www.parentstv.org). There was also a lot of media coverage of the suitability of the show when it originally aired.
[79] *South Park: Bigger, Longer and Uncut.* 1999, directed by Trey Parker.

controversial due to its political content and strong language used, just as *South Park* is today. The show does not conform to the expectations of the animated form or the sitcom form however this further reinforces its difference. As previously suggested, the use of animation, a medium still considered by many as a children's medium, and the show's central characters, children, *South Park* goes further than *All in the Family* ever did in terms of pushing boundaries of audience acceptance.

Futurama

Following the success of *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening created a new animated series called *Futurama*, which premiered in March 1999. (At the time of the initial case study, the show was airing on Fox at 7pm, however the show has since been cancelled and picked up by the cable channel Cartoon Network). With *Futurama* we see a change from the family sitcom formula in the present day to that of the workplace sitcom set in the future. The imagined future is much like that of the Hanna Barbera sci-fi anicom *The Jetsons* with many hi-tech gadgets though in *Futurama* their use is often subversion of what the viewer expects. The animation is stylistically similar to *The Simpsons*, however the people don't have yellow skin and *Futurama* is produced digitally.

The show follows Fry, a pizza delivery boy from the 21st Century, who is accidentally cryogenically frozen and woken up at the dawn of the year 3000. Fry befriends an alcoholic robot named Bender and a one-eyed alien woman, Leela. Together they work as a delivery crew on an intergalactic spaceship, which is run by Fry's great-great-great etc. nephew Professor Farnsworth. [80]

[80] This description of lineage was given in the episode guide on www.gotfuturama.com

There are a number of recurring characters that also work for the 'Planet Express' delivery company, and some who the group encounters from time to time providing an ensemble cast which can occasionally become the focus of an episode offering some variation in the plots.

Like *The Simpsons*, the credits include a sequence, which is slightly different each week, often with a pre-credit gag or epilogue. In one of the episodes featured in this case study, 'When Aliens Attack', there is a direct reference made to the format of the sitcom when Fry explains the structure of the shows, where the resolution of the episodes' event results in the equilibrium of the group being restored.

'Space Pilot 3000' – science fiction and the anicom

The overall premise of the show is the world in the year 3000, and the imagined changes which have occurred, some of which are already well-established ideas in sci-fi literature. In the pilot episode, 'Space Pilot 3000'[81], the general themes of the series are established almost immediately.

Like *The Simpsons* before it, *Futurama* contains a number of cultural references, political as well as to popular cultural icons and in particular to films and television of the science fiction genre. The episode begins with Fry's voice over in the style of the sci-fi drama series *Star Trek;* on the screen we see a rather crudely animated spaceship flying only to be blown up, following with the words 'GAME OVER'. We see Fry has been playing an arcade game at the Pizza place where he works in 1999. Early on it is established how miserable Fry is in his

[81] Original air date, 28 March 1999

life. After he falls in to the cryogenics machine at the New Year countdown, we see time go by over the thousand years he is frozen, with several major events. Aliens attack and destroy the city, which is then re-built in a medieval style. The aliens return and destroy the medieval city, which is then finally re-built into a 'futuristic' city. This city takes the form and style from a number of sci-fi films such as *Metropolis* (1927) and *Bladerunner* (1982) with the towering buildings and various flying machines. Fry then emerges in the year 2999 at the countdown to the New Year in New New York.

With its use of science fiction iconography, *Futurama* could be described as a hybrid genre combining the sitcom with science fiction and animation. Like *The Jetsons* before it *Futurama* combines the anicom with a space age setting. The two shows feature time saving devices in an imagined world, but where *Futurama* takes these ideas from the earlier television shows such as *Star Trek* (1966-69) and even its anicom predecessor, *The Jetsons* predates the science fiction series by four years.[82] Its futuristic gadgets were influenced by science fiction literature and movies but were largely imagined by Hanna Barbera. *The Jetsons* presented an image of the future which was fully automated and essentially fun whereas science fiction is often used to address wider social, moral and political issues of a more serious nature (Hockley 2001 p.26). to a certain extent *Futurama* does this by addressing contemporary issues through the guise of the sci-fi future, which combined with its animatedness and anicom structure enable parody and satire of contemporary culture.

[82] A pilot for *Star Trek* aired in 1964 but the show did not run as a full series until 1966.

This pilot episode of the show is not entirely representative of the format of the rest of the series. As a pilot it sets up the situations, settings and characters which will be present throughout the series. However it is worth examination as it also uses this 're-awakening' of Fry to demonstrate the shows vision of the future, which become characteristic of the series. The episode consists largely of this discovery as Fry learns what the future is like and meets new friends who will feature in the core character group.

The future is presented with numerous *Star Trek* references, as well as many other sci-fi references from both movies and television. Fry finds himself in the future and discovers that little has changed, his scientifically determined job (which he is best at) is a delivery boy, as he was in 1999. Fry had hoped this new future would provide him with the opportunity to improve his life but once he finds that nothing has changed he runs off. It is during this escape when the character Leela, (Fry's 'career officer') is introduced. During a series of chase scenes the audience is introduced to various elements of the future. Mechanical billboards, like the ones we have today, where the strips turn round revealing new posters still don't work, Radio City Music Hall has been replaced and renamed 'Radio City Mutant Hall', and the subway tube system is actually a giant tube which people seem to fly through. On his journey through the tube system Fry goes underwater at one point, past several mutated sea creatures, including 'Blinky', the three-eyed fish from *The Simpsons*.[83] The gags here are both visual and self reflexive.

[83] Blinky first appeared in *The Simpsons* episode 'Two Cars in Every Garage, Three Eyes on Every Fish' (season two)

During Fry's escape he encounters, and befriends, Bender, an alcoholic robot, (who also has suicidal tendencies) who also features as one of the key characters in the show. Still on the run from Leela, the pair hide in the 'Head Museum', which features celebrity heads kept alive in jars (they are fed like fish). Among the celebrities are Leonard Nimoy (one of the stars of *Star Trek*), President Nixon and the show's creator Matt Groening.

The episode ends with Leela, Fry and Bender becoming friends and looking for new jobs. In search of help, they track down Fry's nephew, Professor Farnsworth who is a very old scientist, who also runs an intergalactic delivery service in his spaceship. He hires the three to be part of his crew with Fry as the delivery boy, the same role he had in the past. The final scenes of the episode emulate the earlier scenes of the New Year countdown, again we see the countdown around the world. Fry is essentially in the same position he was at the start of the episode (but 1000 years in the future) restoring his (and the episodes) equilibrium.

As the pilot this episode establishes several themes, which run throughout the life of the series. We can see from the references noted that the show, like *The Simpsons* uses a lot of intertextual references to other films and television, self reflexive references to creator Matt Groening, as well as socio-political and cultural satire. It also uses visual gags and slapstick, but while many of the references and gags in *The Simpsons* are about current trends and popular culture, those in *Futurama* critique the present in the form of comparison to an imagined 'better' future, largely imagined from sci-fi films and television and the shows anicom predecessor *The Jetsons*. This follows the science fiction tradition

of presenting utopian and dystopian futures (Hockley 2001 p.27). The future of *Futurama* is largely perceived as utopian by the rest of the characters (in comparison with the past) but Fry's memories and occasional engagement with his past often presents the future as a dystopian. *Futurama* uses this, and the comparisons to the past (our present), and references to other science fiction television shows (and films) as a comedic device by subverting the audience's expectations of a familiar genre. For example, a visual gag which also references *Star Trek* (in the pilot episode) features Fry observing an 'automatic' door like the live action. In *Star Trek* the doors opened automatically by moving to one side, Fry, and the audience, expect the doors in the future to do the same, but instead they move up, as a result of this unexpected occurrence, Fry walks into it.

Love in the year 3000

A common plot theme in the series is love and relationships, with each of the main characters at some point in a relationship, which generally fails (one exception is the peripheral character Amy's long term relationship with an alien named Kif). The next episode in the case study is also from season one, 'Love's Labours Lost in Space'. The title itself is a parody of both the Shakespeare play and the hit 1960s sci-fi show *Lost in Space* (1965-68). This episode originally aired on 13 April 1999, with Leela as the main focus of the episode, her character is developed further here.

At the beginning of the episode we see an example of Leela's dating experiences. She dates a guy with a lizard tongue and is disgusted by his 'imperfection' despite the fact that she only has one eye. During the date, the pair comment on their food which is shown to be tiny squares on their plate. This gives the

audience the impression that it is some kind of space age food, but they are revealed to be 'after dinner mints' again subverting the audience's expectations using visual gags. Early in the episode we are introduced to the dating and club scene in the year 3000 when the group goes to a club called 'The Hip Joint'. It looks like a building from *The Jetsons*, and Amy comments that it is 'totally retro'. Bender tries to teach Fry about dating in the future and demonstrates his 'gaydar', which is actually a portable radar device for scanning Leela's potential dates.

Leela has some success in attracting a man when the delivery crew go on their mission (each episode features a new delivery mission) when they encounter another spaceship. The ship is under the command of Captain Zapp Brannigan, who seems to exhibit some character traits similar to that of Captain Kirk from *Star Trek*, in something of a parody. Brannigan (and to a lesser extent Kirk) is convinced that he is the most attractive man around and sets out to seduce every woman around. He is particularly intrigued by Leela who resists his advances. His voice is similar to character Troy McClure from *The Simpsons*. Apparently voice actor Phil Hartman who voiced McClure was also supposed to play Brannigan but he passed away before the show began. This complex intertextuality may be functioning as a tribute to Hartman.

Leela is somehow seduced by him and ends up sleeping with him in a reference to Captain Kirk, who seduced all of the females he encountered in the show. In later episodes Brannigan will remind Leela of their night together in attempts to seduce her again, though unlike Kirk, Brannigan fails and she never submits a second time. Leela fails to find love in this episode but finds companionship in a

new pet which they found on the mission. At the end of the episode, we see both captains making their 'logs' in another *Star Trek* reference each ending up alone (or at least without a human companion).

Throughout the series the issue of love, particularly between Leela and Fry is raised, and often dealt with, with a great deal of emotion. This was fairly unusual in a sitcom, live action or anicom until the 1990s, when shows began to be more sentimental, particularly in shows such as *Friends* which suggests a development in the genre.

Television - past and future

Like many of the anicoms examined so far, *Futurama* frequently refers to television (and movies) in parody, satire or in a passing reference. In episode 6, entitled 'A Fishfull of Dollars' [84], a parody of the western title, *A Fistful of Dollars*, there are frequent television references as well as commentary on the power of advertising. Fry is introduced to a new form of advertising when he discovers that companies in the year 3000 can advertise in people's dreams. He is rather disturbed by the subliminal advertising but is reminded of the prevalence of advertisements in the 20th Century. Fry is then taken shopping to experience consumerism in the future, which includes mirrors which make you look good in any clothing. Realising he has no cash, Fry attempts to use his old ATM card in the bank, and finds out that his account has been accruing interest for 1000 years and he is very rich.

[84] Original air date, 27 April 1999

With his new found wealth Fry goes on a spending spree buying a lot of relics from the 20th Century to remind him of home. The others are not so impressed with the old style products, especially the 'low definition' television, which they tell Fry was found to cause 'eye cancer'. He also buys Ted Danson, star of the popular long running live action sitcom *Cheers'* (1982-93), skeleton (for a sitcom idea he has) and an 'antique robot toy' for Bender. We also discover that in the year 3000 that the rapper Sir Mix – A Lot is considered to be classical music.

This episode is an amusing critique of many aspects of current popular culture as well as those from the past. Many of the tapes of old television shows, which Fry watched, are old 1980s sitcoms. There is also an appearance by actress Pamela Anderson's head, in which she mentions *Baywatch the Movie* (which was apparently made after Fry was frozen), as well as the fact that she won the best actress Oscar for the film. This referencing of television, past as well as contemporary occurs throughout the show.

This is particularly evident in the next episode in the case study, 'When Aliens Attack' [85] the overall theme which can only be described as, 'television', Fry's obsession with it and, how too much TV is not necessarily a bad thing. The episode begins back in 1999 when Fry is making a delivery to a TV station, a 'FOX affiliate'. Fry likes shows of the genre 'World's blankest blanks'; a commentary on the many Fox 'reality' shows with titles such as *'World's Deadliest Gangs'* or *'World's Scariest Police Chases'*. After he accidentally spills beer on the transmitter Fry and the workman have a wonderful exchange where they again criticise the home network:

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[85] Original air date: 7 November 1999

STATION GUY
You knocked FOX off the air!

FRY
Like anyone on Earth cares

We then hear the FOX announcer saying, due to technical difficulties the station will now be showing, "eight animated shows in a row" in an amusing commentary on FOX's scheduling of similar programs in blocks, during the early 1990s. *Futurama*, like *The Simpsons* which also references, and usually criticises, FOX are broadcast on the FOX network and produced by 20th Century Fox Productions, both part of the same company, News International.

Much of this episode is either TV or movie parody, for example:

- *Independence Day* – the monument of the White House on the beach is blown up, in the style of the aforementioned movie.
- *Star Wars* – when Zapp calls up all ships there is a scene where the men are being debriefed. They are sitting in a room very similar to the one in the sci-fi classic *Star Wars* before the big battle scene. The helmets the pilots wear are similar to the style of that worn by lead character Luke Skywalker.

The TV show discussed by the characters is 'Single Female Lawyer'. The main character, Jenny McNeil bears a remarkable resemblance to television character of self-titled show *Ally McBeal* (1997-2002), which is about a lawyer who is single and female, and like 'Jenny McNeil' also wears very short mini-skirts.

Or commentary on television itself:

LEELA
This isn't TV it's real life, can't you tell the difference?

FRY
Sure I just like TV better.

FRY
TV audiences don't want to see anything original, they want to see the same thing they've seen a thousand times before.

BENDER
What you talkin' 'bout Fry?

Leela's comment to Fry is an amusing play on realism which demonstrates the show's awareness of its conventions within television. She is clearly not real by definition of being both on television and animated, however she states that they are more real than television. The latter comment is a reference to the famous catchphrase of the character Arnold from the popular live action *Diff'rent Strokes* (1978-86), "What you talkin' 'bout Willis?". Fry's comment about originality suggests that generic progression is difficult to accomplish within the audiences' horizon of expectations for such a clearly codified genre as the sitcom. (Neale 2000 p.56) However I have suggested in previous chapters that while the audience's perceptions and expectations are important in genre classification, they are subject to change. This was particularly evident throughout the 1980s when the sitcom audience went into decline.

However the last scene featuring Fry's voice over and the shot of the city is a final commentary on the 'rules' of television in Fry's opinion:

FRY
The Secret of all TV shows...at the end of the episode, everything is right back to normal.

This reference to the narrative structure of sitcoms becomes the focus of the gag when we see the camera pan round to reveal that although the situation in the office, for Fry and the others, has returned to normal, outside the city is in ruins.

While the narrative structure of the show is not explicitly discussed in this section (it will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter) the show does follow the sitcom narrative structure. The case study of the series with the many examples of cultural references, and this use of the sitcom narrative demonstrate that the show conforms to the generic and cultural verisimilitude of the sitcom. The self-reflexivity of the show also suggests a development within the genre, particularly the anicom, in which the device is becoming frequently used. This is particularly evident in the next section of the chapter.

Futurama also marks out its difference from its counterparts, despite the commonality of self-reflexivity, in its particular focus on references from the science fiction genre. The references which are at the centre of most of the gags are specific to the genre and as such pre-judges the audience for the show as fans of, or at least viewers who are familiar with, the science fiction genre. This then creates a hybrid genre between sci-fi and sitcom.

However, as previously mentioned, *Futurama* has essentially been cancelled by the FOX network. There are a number of unaired episodes which the network will air and still includes it in the schedule line up. Though there is a large fan base, which is particularly evident on the Internet, the hybrid genre was not able to sustain interest in the mainstream prime time slot.

Family Guy

Family Guy was created by animator Seth MacFarlane, who also provides many of the characters' voices. The show premiered in early 1999 though it was conceived some time earlier. It was commissioned following the success of similar animated shows already on the Fox network.

The show is a domestic family sitcom, similar in style (both use cel animation) to *The Simpsons*, and indeed follows the traditional character grouping of the domestic sitcom, featuring the Griffin family consisting of Peter the father, Lois the mother, 2.5 kids and family pet. The family also includes the occasional appearance of an older parent, grandparent, in this case, Peter's dad. Peter (voiced by Seth MacFarlane) shares many of the personality traits of previous stereotypical sitcom patriarchs, such as Homer Simpson or Fred Flintstone. He is overweight, something of a buffoon, likes to drink and watch television, and does not have the ideal relationship with his children. However he has a very loving relationship with his, more attractive wife, Lois. Lois is the real head of the household, running the home, looking after baby Stewie, as well as teaching piano lessons on the side. Her talent for music has been the subject of at least one episode in the first season. They have eldest daughter Meg, a stereotypical moody teenager, who longs for popularity and the acceptance of her peers and Chris, the 'middle child'. The subversion of the classic set-up however, is the talking dog Brian, who acts as the wise member of the family, often gives advice to Peter, and drinks a lot. He also walks upright. This device makes use of the opportunity to subvert 'the real' through the medium of animation, as previously discussed, something, which would be impossible to do with live-action. (Wells 2002a p.97) Stewie, the baby of family also talks, but in the style of an English

thespian (again subverting conventions), who has megalomaniacal tendencies, always plotting to destroy his mother whom he blames for bringing him into the world.

Television

While the show often focuses on family problems and relationships in the nature of many other sitcoms, like *Futurama* it does so while using references to those other sitcoms. The entire show is often about television. It references other shows, sometimes to pass commentary on them, or quite often subvert the content. For example in episode two, 'I Never Met the Dead man', there is a reference to Hanna Barbera cartoon *Scooby Doo.* Upon finding a murder victim, the 'wholesome' character Fred is seen swearing. These references can take many forms throughout the show from simple reference, to parody.

The many television references occur, either on the television the family is watching, usually at the beginning and end of every episode, or in a fantasy or dreamlike state. There have also been times when the fantasy meets reality, with a flashback in which there seems to have been some interaction between the television show and one of the family members, usually Peter. Though not entirely impossible in live action shows, this ability to mix past shows and characters with another show is enabled by the medium of animation.

The first episode to feature a large number of television references is in the aforementioned 'I Never Met the Dead man'[86]. The episode focuses on Peter's obsession with television and how he copes without it, when an accident during a

[86] originally aired on 11 April 1999

driving lesson knocks out the entire town's cable TV system. The TV references are numerous and include the children's educational show *Sesame Street*. When Stewie is playing with a *Sesame Street* toy he comments on the beloved character who had died several years earlier, suggesting that he...'Dispatched Mr. Hooper'. The fans of the long running show have often commented on their sadness when the man playing the character died (Borgenicht 1998 p.124). There is a reference to William Shatner, star of Star Trek, who was often mocked for his acting abilities. Peter is watching the show on TV and the star's voice is exaggerated to lampoon his style.

Like other anicoms the show comments on the 'classic cartoons' by Warner Bros. In this episode Peter has a fantasy with *Road Runner* character Wile E Coyote in his car. In the fantasy Peter is giving the Coyote advice on how to get rid of his arch rival, the road runner, something the character repeatedly failed to do in the cartoons.

Before knocking out the television transmitter Peter is watching the 1970s cop show *CHiPS*, the 'gag' occurs when star Erik Estrada is chatting up a woman while crime goes on in the background, suggesting that the lead characters in the show were more concerned with looking good than with fighting crime. Like its anicom counterparts also broadcast on Fox, *The Simpsons* and *Futurama*, *Family Guy* often includes jokes at the network's expense. Peter is watching a new FOX reality show; "*Fast Animals, Slow Children*", the spoof show features a tiger chasing a fat kid, in the style of many Fox shows like those 'World's blankest blanks' that Fry enjoys.

After Peter loses his television, he calls a friend (whose TV is still working) and asks what he is watching. The friend describes an episode of the popular cop show, *NYPD Blue*. The show has a reputation for characters stripping off in episodes. In the episode Peter's friend describes lead characters Sipowitz, during an interrogation, warning a detainee that if he fails to co-operate Sipowitz will '...show you my ass'. In a parody of the popular show *The Wonder Years*, Meg is the troubled teen with the voice over device which gives the audience insight into the character's thoughts.

Peter dreams of the shows he is missing without his TV. The dream sequence is similar to an early scene in the film *The Wizard of Oz* when Dorothy is swept up into a tornado. However in the dream, Peter is the one inside the twister and characters from old shows go past. Peter sees *Alf,* Gilligan from *Gilligan's Island*, the cast of *Lost in Space*, Jeanie from *I dream of Jeanie* who then turns into Samantha from *Bewitched*, parodying the end of the scene in the film where the neighbour turns into a witch.

Peter becomes desperate without TV and decides to make his own. He walks around carrying a frame like a television set, to view life like TV. He follows Meg to school observing her activities and says he is watching the popular teen drama series *Beverly Hills 90210.* In a comment on formulaic nature of television there is another *Star Trek* reference. We see the 'away team' being picked with all lead characters and one ensign, who always get killed off. Later when Peter is talking to (in his second appearance of the episode) William Shatner about the nature of TV and its 'convenient plot turns', Shatner is killed off instead of the ensign, who comments that he didn't see it coming. The

episode ends with the television transmitter being restored in a 'convenient plot turn' restoring the equilibrium.

In 'Mind over Murder' the TV references include a spoof of 'Mentos' mints advertisements on the Griffin's television where Booth shoots Lincoln then has some mints, commenting on the ridiculous situations which occur in the real mint advertisements. In another nod to the children's television show, Peter watches '*Homicide* life on *Sesame Street'* subverting the children's show by combining it with the gritty police drama *Homicide Life on the Street* and with suggestions about the puppets in 'adult' situations. In a parody of the Kevin Costner baseball movie, *Field of Dreams* Peter is convinced to build a bar in his basement. Peter hears the same thing as the character in the movie, "If you build it they will come" but instead of a baseball park he builds a bar. There is also discussion of live action sitcom *Home Improvement* star Tim Allen's publicly known criminal record.

The TV references in this episode include the children's show *Teletubbies* which Stewie is watching. The family watches an 'A & E Biography' featuring 'That other guy from Wham' referring to the less well known member of the 1980s pop duo, Andrew Ridgley, as well as the long running game show *Wheel of Fortune.*

This episode provides further characterisation in the show when we learn that Peter works in a toy factory (though in a white collar role, like Homer Simpson and Harry Boyle before him) and is trying to come up with a new toy idea. Always obsessed with television Peter suggests a '*Facts of Life* Transformer' based on the actual 'Transformer' toy (which was also a cartoon in the late

1980s) that transforms vehicles such as planes and trucks into robots, merged with characters from the late 1970s US sitcom *Facts of Life*.

The episode ends with a *Twilight Zone* (1959 -65) parody, the scene is shot in black and white with a narrator, speaking in the style of the cult television show. The final credit sequence features Stewie hallucinating that he is crawling on the ceiling with his head turning round. He is supposed to be 'coming down' from his pancake 'high'. This is similar to a scene in the movie *Trainspotting* (1996) when the main character trying to kick his heroin habit.

There are many other film and television references from these episodes which are too numerous to mention in detail. These episodes demonstrate that any type of television show will be referred to, from adult drama to children's educational shows and provide an example of the extent to which the nature and content of television itself has become the subject of another television show.

Social commentary

As well as the parody and television references, the show includes social commentary. In 'Mind over Murder' [87] there are still occasional television and movie references, but more significant is the inclusion of reference to a controversial court case. At one point Stewie demands "Shake me like a British nanny", in reference to the Louise Woodward case, in which the British nanny working in the US was accused of killing the baby in her care by shaking it too hard. This case went on for some time and received extensive media coverage.

[87] Original Air Date, 25 April 1999

In episode 5, 'A Hero Sits Next Door' [88] we learn more about Peter and his personality. Peter reluctantly agrees to meet the new neighbours, everyone in the Griffin family likes them except him. Peter discovers that not only is neighbour Joe a great all round guy, but is also in a wheel chair as a result of his job as a policeman. We see a flashback to Joe's career when he is apprehending a thief, here it is *The Grinch Who Stole Christmas* from the popular Dr Suess book, though in this case the Grinch is being chased by Joe. Peter is jealous of Joe's hero status and decides he wants to be a hero too. Peter is not above trying to compete with a man in a wheelchair portraying him as shallow, in the tradition of the 'buffoon' character of the sitcom described by Butsch. (1995)

A political reference is made in this episode with a joke about former President Clinton, but is accompanied by 'canned laughter' in this instance to emphasize the gag, while including another TV reference, this time to the structure of the sitcom. (Grote 1983 p.66)

In episode 12, 'Love Thy Trophy' [89], the episode's theme is dominated by television from the start when the neighbourhoods compete with designs for the town's harvest festival float design. The theme which was picked out was Peter's suggestion of 'That episode of *Who's the Boss* when...'. Despite the eventually all out war in the street after they disagree who gets to keep the trophy their float won, the neighbours decide to work together when Stewie is taken away from the Griffin household by social services in the peer pressure, drug themed sub-plot.

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[88] Original air date: 2 May 1999
[89] Original air date: 14 March 2000

The episode begins with the discussion of a particular episode of the 1980s sitcom *Who's the Boss* as a float theme. In an amusing critique of the National Rifle Association (NRA), the parade theme is chosen by Charlton Heston, the NRA spokesman, who is shooting at doves which have the winning theme tied to them. Heston features again at the end of the episode in an ironic twist when he himself is shot. Even while he is dying Heston claims it is alright as it is every American's right to bear arms.

During the episode the news announces that 'they've found the real killer!' in the O.J. Simpson case, referring to the controversial court case which found football star O.J Simpson not guilty of his wife's murder despite some overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

In the sub plot involving Meg and Stewie, pancakes are used as a metaphor for drugs when Stewie gets hooked. Meg gives in to peer pressure to get a fashionable accessory, allowing Stewie to be taken to a foster home in the process. The home Stewie is taken to already has a number of other foster children. Stewie refers to them as a 'Benetton' advertisement, in a comment on the multi-racial, often controversial advertising campaigns from the Italian clothing company. Stewie is often the source of much of the comedy as his sarcasm acts as a critique of the television and social issues which are referred to throughout the series.

Family Guy, like its animated counterparts follows the sitcom narrative structure in terms of its length and use of the equilibrium formula identified by Todorov and Marc. Like the other 1990s anicoms does not use canned laughter, unlike many live action sitcoms, and early anicoms. The show occasionally features a

pre credit sequence, often a gag which has no relation to the rest of the episode however the main section of the show follows with the restoration of equilibrium The show last aired in February 2002. Despite high ratings for its Thursday night time slot and an Internet campaign from fans to save it, home network FOX cancelled the show.

Home Movies

After *Dr Katz* was cancelled, Tom Synder began to work on another anicom, again featuring a divorced parent and son, but this time it would be a single mother and her eight year old son who would be the focus of the series. *Home Movies* focuses on the son, eight year old Brendon Small as he deals with his family life, divorcee mother Paula, absent father Andrew and baby sister Josie, as well as school and his after school soccer club. Brendon is also a budding movie maker who along with his friends Jason and Melissa, write, direct and star in their own unique brand of movies (which often parody Hollywood movies and directors).

Like *Dr Katz* the show features multiple locations including Brendon's home (including his basement 'studio'), the soccer field where he plays every day and his school. There are a number of other, occasional locations which are introduced throughout the series. The concept of time is more linear than in *Dr Katz*, but the scenes are divided between Brendon's life and his movies. The movies are often used (though not always consciously) by Brendon as outlets for how he is feeling about school or family and deals with issues better in his movies than in his life. The movies also serve as a comic device with their use of movie parody.

In the first season, the show used 'Squigglevision' (also used for *Dr Katz*) as its animation production method, but in season two changed to the 'Flash' digital animation method.[90] The show still has the same look but the animation is smoother and easier to watch, as there is not the constant motion as with the other technique. Unlike *Dr Katz* the show relies on a script rather than the Retroscripting technique (the first five episodes used Retroscripting[91]), however to maintain the same sense of comic timing and to achieve the best material the actors record the script completely but also improvise a large amount of it. These two recordings are then put together and the best material selected for the final version of the episode (Schatz 2000).

The show first aired in the US in April 1999 with a running time of 30 min on UPN but after the first season moved to the Cartoon Network where it currently airs at10 P.M. Though not strictly prime time, the show heads the schedule for 'Adult Swim', the Cartoon Network's night time adult animation slot. With continuing success the third season of the show has now gone into production.

Like *Dr Katz* and *King of the Hill,* the show features a large amount of observational comedy, but also uses intertextuality, usually in the movie sections, as well as social commentary and satire. The satire is often conceived using the innocence of the children and their questions, much like that in *South Park*, though unlike its counterpart, the comedy is perhaps more sophisticated as the references are more subtle.

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[90] www.tvtome.com/HomeMovies/season2.html
[91] 'Home Movies Super Site' http://homemovies.toonzone.net

The main characters in the show are, as previously mentioned Brendon Small who lives with his divorced mother Paula and baby sister Josie. Brendon's best friends Melissa and Jason form the rest of the movie production company, and usually the cast. Occasionally other children from the neighbourhood or school are included, most notable in later episodes, Walter and Perry, two rather odd little boys who seem to be unable to do anything without the other, provide a number of comedic moments.

The other main character is the school soccer coach, Coach McGuirk. He started out in a smaller role but his part seems to have increased over the course of the two seasons due to the fact that he is consistently the funniest character. Sharing many characteristics of the key adult figure in most anicoms, and indeed sitcoms, McGuirk is rather overweight, surly and seems to have a drink problem. Though unlike, Homer Simpson, Peter Griffin or even Fred Flintstone, John McGuirk doesn't have an attractive, intelligent wife to support him, in several episodes we have seen what a failure he is with women. In one episode late in season two, an attractive women propositions him, but unused to the positive attention, he runs away. He is almost a perfect tragic comic figure as the character who always loses despite his efforts, yet provides the source of comedy, though his relationship with Brendon seems to have been improving throughout the last season.

Family

Issues within family are presented throughout the show, from Paula trying to juggle life as a single parent, her relationship with her own parents, to Brendon's search for a father figure and how this is represented in his movies. In the

episode entitled, 'Dad' [92] Brendon meets his dad for the first time since his parent's divorce. The opening scene with Paula coaching Brendon on how to behave brilliantly portrays the anxiety of both the child and parent in a divorce situation, though this is not uncommon in the sitcom, with shows adopting the structure of the family to reflect societal changes, such as single parent families, and families with other relatives living with them. This was seen throughout the 1970s and 1980s in the live action sitcom when the 'nuclear' family represented on television changed to include alternative family groupings.

After the initial meeting Brendon and his dad go to the zoo where they meet dad's rather uptight, and considerably younger girlfriend, Linda. The relationship between the three of them becomes something of a focus for later episodes, and though never fully resolved as a working friendship or family unit, Brendon develops a better relationship with his father and becomes slightly more accepting of Linda near the end of the season.

Occasionally the show features some kind of musical number, usually in one of the films but in this episode the director uses a musical montage to show the whole day out at the zoo in a short time. It provides a nice comedic segment using music which has a 1960s sound and wouldn't have been out of place in a 1960s sitcom.

While Brendon and his father's relationship improves throughout the series, there is always the presence of Coach McGuirk as a surrogate father figure for Brendon. Since the first episode McGuirk has given Brendon advice while at soccer training. In the season two episode, 'History' Brendon's teacher, Mr

[92] O.A.D: 17 February 2002

Lynch wants Brendon to get a tutor, but we find out that McGuirk has been tutoring him, but giving him false information, or rather nothing useful. He has explained about alien conspiracy theory with Area 51, but when asked about historical figures he can tell about Samuel Adams, that he was a 'brewer and Patriot' and that he knows what he looks like. McGuirk gets his information from the label of the beer 'Sam Adams' which features the tag line 'Brewer and Patriot' after the famous Bostonian, as well as a drawing of the man highlighting McGuirk's love of beer (though McGuirk does tell Brendon where he has acquired his knowledge).

The relationship between Brendon and Coach McGuirk is developed further in this episode. We have seen them form a friendship which provided Brendon with a form of father figure, which of course he longer needs, as he met his father in 'Dad', though it is still clear that McGuirk cares about him. The 'coach' is a specific figure in American popular culture but where the coach would act as a role model, or advisor, McGuirk, as the tragic hero fails in his advice, or to be a good role model, he frequently tells Brendon not to follow his examples. This is seen from the very first episode when McGuirk is warning Brendon not to get a tattoo. He shows Brendon his, as an example of the mistakes which cannot be erased. His tattoos are of a banana and a cow, both of which were inspired by food products.[93]

[93] Episode 1 'Stay away from my Mom!'

In the later episode 'Pizza Club'[94] Brendon and his father are getting on much better, which annoys McGuirk who feels left out. Eventually they all end up together.

School and Movies

In the episode 'History' [95], the narrative focus is on the 'Starboy' movie Brendon and his friends are currently making. This follows up an earlier episode when the Starboy superhero concept is first introduced. The subplot of Brendon's school problem of failing History is interspersed between scenes of the film. Brendon's problem is apparent lack of concentration and focus, which is demonstrated in the constant referring back to the movie, as though the director couldn't focus on the proper story either. To reinforce that Brendon is failing history, the movie is full of historical inaccuracies in the movie's introduction of the evil trio of historical figures: George Washington is described as the 'freer of the slaves' even though that was Lincoln, and that he was impeached for the shooting of Abe Lincoln. Lincoln was president decades after Washington died. Artist Picasso is introduced by saying he cut off his ear and mailed it to his ex-girlfriend when it was Dutch artist Van Gogh who cut off his ear. The other character in the movie to be introduced is Annie Oakley who is described as orphaned, taken in by Daddy Warbucks and forced to sing. This refers to the musical *Annie* and is in no way related to Annie Oakley the 'wild west' markswoman.

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[94] O.A.D: 24 March 2002
[95] O.A.D: 10 March 2002

The hostages are William Shakespeare, Oliver Twist and some sort of 'mermaid queen'. They are tied together, the manner of which changes throughout the show, but at one point they are standing encircled by spinning loops, which resemble the way the villains in the movie *Superman II* were held. There is another *Superman* parody at the end, once the trio have been defeated they are seen trapped in a Polaroid photo spinning in space. Again the evil trio in *Superman II* were in a similar position, though they were trapped in a sheet of glass rather than in a photo. Starboy's spaceship is called 'The Jefferson Spaceplane', a mixture of bands The Jefferson Airplane and Starship, which the former became. At school we see Brendon drawing the 'Spaceplane'. These references to dated popular culture reflect the creators own pop culture knowledge as well as acknowledging the adult audience the show is made for.

The episode 'Writer's Block' [96] features the main characters experiencing writers block in some form or another. Paula is successful in her romance writing initially but later loses the inspiration. Brendon has no inspiration at all and looks to Jason and Melissa for input into the latest project, the school writers fair. Meanwhile Coach McGuirk is experiencing some problems sleeping, and ends up attending a clinic which he finds can be rather lucrative. If he spends enough time being observed he will be well paid and his ultimate goal in the episode is to make enough money for a 'DVD player', of course he fails when he regains his sleep before the experiment is over.

There are a number of verbal gags in this episode, which exemplify the style of comedy used throughout the series:

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[96] O.A.D: March 2002

- Melissa to McGuirk, 'Are you on another bender?'
- When Brendon tries to find inspiration from his dreams he tells Jason and Melissa he has 'tapped into' his brain. Jason asks, 'did you use a drill?'
- McGuirk at the sleep clinic, 'if you want a guinea pig get a rabbit'

In the school auditorium, a poster 're-elect Thackery in 2002' referring to an earlier episode. Walter and Perry read a poem they wrote called 'We Hate Fenton'. Fenton featured in several earlier episodes, always behaving badly. The use of both of these elements provides continuity in the series.

The subplot of the 'Pizza Club' episode features the inclusion of another character Dwayne who has been a secondary character since the beginning of the series. Brendon's latest movie project sees him helping out local teenage musician Dwayne, who regularly provides the score for many of the movies by making a promotional documentary about his band. The documentary is filmed in the style of VH1 show *Behind the Music*. The amplifier that Dwayne has features a volume control with an 11 written on it in a parody of the aforementioned series and movie *This is Spinal Tap*, the spoof 'rockumentary'. The episode features several movie and television references, for example the movie the group are currently working on is, *My Two Dads* meets *The Fugitive*. We also learn that Brendon has Jason tied into a multi-picture deal of 34,000 films.

The structure of the show always includes a scene on the soccer field and at least one of a movie being made, though the focus is usually more on the movies. There may also be one in the class or at home, but the scenes often cut back and forth in a similar style to that used in *Dr Katz*. As well as the movies there are

musical numbers provided by Brendon's friend Dwayne, who supplies the music for the movies. These songs are usually part of the movie often enabling the progression of the narrative of the movie (and the episode). Dwayne has also been the subject of some of the episodes,

The resolution of the narrative in *Home Movies* does not always reflect the initial familiar status quo of the start of the episode as we have seen in other anicoms such as *The Flintstones* or *Family Guy*, however there is a resolution, or conclusion of the 'ritual error' or situation which occurs in the episode.

Anicom – Variation and Verisimilitude

The examination of the anicoms featured in the case studies demonstrates diversity in the sitcom genre with a variety of animation techniques, themes and comedy in the various series. Despite differences in each of the shows there are commonalities which further reinforce their categorisation in the sitcom genre. The characterisation in the shows has only been briefly discussed and will therefore be examined further. If we consider the same character roles identified by Propp and Grote, the role of hero, fool, innocent and scoundrel, as discussed in previous chapters, we can demonstrate the similarity in the 1990s anicoms.

We can see in Table 5 that the anicoms indeed feature the common character types, though like the live action sitcoms in the 1980s, there are more anicoms where the character types are more ambiguous and could feature one character in many roles, particularly the shows with ensemble cast where the many characters 'swap' roles. For example, in *Dr Katz*, the small number of characters is easily categorised by type, whereas the larger 'cast' of *Futurama* cannot be so easily defined, with character Fry able to change between the hero, fool and innocent.

Show	Date	Character Type				No. Char.
		Hero	Fool	Innocent	Scoundrel	
The Simpsons	1989/90	Homer	Homer	Marge/ Lisa	Bart	5
Dr Katz	1995	Dr Katz	Ben Katz	Julie	Laura	5
King of the Hill	1997	Hank/Peggy	Dale, Bill	Bobby/ Luanne/Hank		5
South Park	1997	Stan/Kyle	Cartman	Kenny	Cartman	4
Futurama	1999	Fry/ Leela	Fry/Farnsworth	Fry/ Amy	Bender	7
Family Guy	1999	Lois/Brian	Peter	Chris	Stewie	6
Home Movies	1999	Brendon	McGuirk	Jason	McGuirk	5

Table 5 - The anicom after Grote and Propp 1989 - 2000

Likewise the characters in *King of the Hill* can be identified in multiple type roles. Hank and Peggy are often interchangeable in the role of hero. Equally Hank can be seen in the role of innocent through his occasional naivety to what is going on around him. These roles depend on the storyline for the character in any particular episode. As well as the character types the table also demonstrates that the average number of characters in the anicoms is five, as Grote suggested (1983 p.80).

Despite the variety in the anicoms, the animation style, or the type of comedy, the dominant situation in the anicoms in the 1990s is the domestic situation. The anicoms parallel the live action show of the same decade where the dominant setting is also domestic.[97] The continuing theme of the importance of family has dominated the sitcom genre throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s chapter demonstrated the political and social changes in that decade and its effects on the sitcom, and television as a whole. The animation became marketed for children and disappeared from primetime. In 1989 when *The Simpsons* began the political climate was changing again. Still with a Republican government, the audiences were looking for more diversity in their entertainment, and were more accepting of satire and parody. The networks embraced this with live action shows such as *Married with Children* and *Roseanne* which both subverted the 'traditional' domestic setting. The dysfunction in families became common in the sitcom, both live action and animated. The family and domestic situation still provided a basis for the comedy, however with increasing social and cultural verisimilitude the shows developed away from family oriented in terms of audience, to adult, with family as the content.

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[97] See Appendix A

The use of 'family' as the specific content and the common character types enables the anicoms to continue and maintain the tradition of stereotypes. The stereotypical male role has changed somewhat from all knowing, wise father and good, breadwinning husband in early live action shows such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* to what Butsch (1995) has termed the 'working class male buffoon' in both live action and animated sitcom. Examples of which include Archie Bunker, Al Bundy, Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin.

These stereotypes remain, however there are the occasional variations on this theme. In *Roseanne* for example, Dan Conner was not the buffoon, but rather a put upon figure with Roseanne as the main character and true head of the household. The male role as head has also changed as society's notions of the nuclear family have changed. The live action sitcoms of the 1980s and the early 1990s experimented with the notions of role reversal, the male homemaker, female breadwinner in *Who's the Boss?* or two single mothers sharing a house in *Kate and Allie.* These developments however were not reflected in the anicoms of the early 1990s. Jay Sherman in *The Critic* was a divorced father, but the long running show *The Simpsons* returned to the notion of the nuclear family structure for its setting. It is within the individual animated shows of the 1990s that we see the examples, or subversion of the stereotypes. The father as buffoon occurs in *The Simpsons,* and *Family Guy,* both shows also featuring an attractive wife who supports the household. Lois Griffin is a more assertive figure than Marge Simpson, but both manage a household with an overweight husband (who generally adopts the role of fool) and three children, one of which is a baby.

Narrative

This chapter has revealed an element of genre progression through the decade, (which is continuing), through the inherent difference evident in some of the anicoms in the study. As in previous chapters I return to Marc's formula of the sitcom narrative structure to further reinforce the shows' generic status as well as highlight the 'difference' in the shows. ("Episode= Familiar Status Quo=> Ritual error made=> Ritual lesson learned=> Familiar Status Quo." (1997 p.190)

The Simpsons

Throughout the series the main theme of the importance of family has been presented in a number of different forms, dealing with separate issues within family. The episodes in the case study follow these themes and feature a common ritual error, which is often made by Homer.

In *episode 7G11 'Life on the fast lane'* Homer and Marge's relationship is put under strain by Homer's error, forgetting Marge's birthday:

=> its Marge's birthday and Homer has forgotten. He searches all day for the perfect gift to give to her at dinner. => Homer presents Marge with a new bowling ball, which is really for him. Angry, Marge decides to go bowling to spite him and meets the amorous Jacque who takes an immediate liking to Marge. => Marge continues gong bowling (and seeing Jacque) and Homer starts to realise that he may lose his wife. => Marge agrees to meet Jacque at his apartment but as she drives towards his building she thinks more and more about Homer and how she really feels. => Marge arrives at the nuclear plant and surprises Homer. They leave together happy again.

Despite the temptation Marge faces she ultimately decides that her relationship with Homer is more important. This issue is raised again, but in reverse, in *episode 1F07 'The Last Temptation of Homer'*:

Homer meets a new co-worker, the very attractive Mindy Simmons. => Homer tries not to think about Mindy but it seems she shares his passion for food and he tries to avoid her at all costs. In the meantime Marge is unwell and looking decidedly unattractive. => Homer and Mindy are picked to go on a work conference together and everything seems to lead to them being alone or in a romantic situation. Mindy propositions Homer. => In the final scene we find out that Homer has invited Marge to the hotel where he is staying and they have a romantic weekend.

Once again the problem is resolved, with the couple ultimately forgetting their temptation. The ritual error in both episodes was essentially made by Homer. While it was Marge who was tempted with Jacque, it was Homer's actions which led her to the bowling alley. Likewise it was Homer's failed attempts to ignore Mindy which led to their business trip.

As well as Homer and Marge's marriage, the relationship between siblings Bart and Lisa is also a feature of many episodes. In *episode 7F07 (season 2) 'Bart Vs Thanksgiving'* Bart's behaviour tests his relationship with his sister, as well as affecting the entire family gathering:

The family is getting ready for Thanksgiving dinner with the whole family invited (including Grampa, Marge's mother and two sisters Patty and Selma). Lisa has worked all day to make a centre piece for the dinner table => Bart

'makes room' for the turkey and inadvertently knocks Lisa's creation into the fire destroying it. => After being sent to his room as punishment, Bart runs away. He ends up at the local homeless shelter and has dinner after all. => after returning home and hearing how upset Lisa is, Bart apologises and realises his mistake. => the family enjoys leftovers and spend a quiet Thanksgiving evening together.

In this episode it is Bart who makes the ritual error, which is a common occurrence in the series. The errors are generally made by either Homer or Bart, however in *episode 8F14 'Homer Alone'* the whole family contribute in driving Marge to the edge:

Marge is getting everyone ready for his or her day at school and work, but is overloaded with tasks. => After a number of trying situations (Homer's dry cleaning gets ruined, traffic is bad etc.) Marge stops her car on the bridge and refuses to move, having snapped. => Homer arrives and convinces her to come home and that he'll be more helpful. Marge decides she needs a vacation and heads off to 'Rancho Relaxo' a spa resort. => the kids stay with Patty and Selma and Homer is left with baby Maggie, who he ultimately loses. => Marge enjoys her trip and decides she can come home, just as Homer finds Maggie. => the family greet Marge and make her promise never to leave them again and that they will help her out.

These episodes reveal a commonality in the resolution of the ritual error, where it is usually a realisation of love, or appreciation for another family member which resolves the issue, or error.

The examination of this show revealed the use of a rather unusual narrative format, which was punctuated by short 'cuts' between scenes. These shorter scenes initially seem to disrupt the narrative flow, however the overall plot of the episode is referred to throughout and its constant presence enables the episode to follow the model suggested by Marc (1997). The themes of the episode are generally the issue of Ben's future and lack of interest in a career, Katz's feelings about aging and their relationship. In *episode 408 'Closets' (O.A.D: 10 August 1997)* Ben finds a useful way to spend his day, attempting to re-organise their living, and storage space:

=> Katz and Ben discuss their storage needs over breakfast. => Ben tries to solve the problem by hiring a company to re-organise their closets. Through a series of phone calls to Katz, they discuss the specifics of the problem. Katz has two patients in this episode who discuss their personal problems. => when the closet company is finished Katz and Ben are disappointed with the result. => they still have storage problems, returning them to the familiar status quo or situation which was set up at the start. The problem has been resolved, though unsatisfactorily. The equilibrium is thus restored.

The main focus of *Episode 503 'Old Man' (O.A.D: 17 June 1998)* is Ben and Katz dealing with aging. Ben tries to get involved in his father's future plans, again looking for a project to keep him busy, as in the previous episode. By looking for alternative ways to pass his time, Ben is able to avoid the question of his own future:

=> After sleeping late one morning, Ben becomes concerned that Katz is becoming an old man. => They begin to discuss retirement and the ageing process. =>Ben wants Katz to get a boat, but later buys him some paints so he can have a hobby when he retires. => Eventually Katz's energy level returns to normal and he declares his plan to continue working for a while longer. In a voice-over during the credits, he and Ben discuss plans to get a mobile home and tour the country. Katz's declaration that he is once more feeling fit restores the equilibrium of the episode, however the pair continue to discuss the problem over the closing credits despite this resolution. The familiar status quo will have returned by the start of the next episode.

Ben and Katz's relationship is often strained, generally as a result of Ben's unemployment, and in *Episode 514 'The Waltz' (O.A.D: 5 October 1998)* when Katz seeks help elsewhere it results in a tiff between the two:

=>"As Katz and Ben prepare to go to Katz's niece Rachel's wedding, Katz discovers that since Uncle Morty is dead, he'll have to dance with Rachel => and he can't waltz. =>He asks Laura to teach him, and she says no but eventually agrees, for $200 (and he can't touch her...=>Ben goes to Vic's Video Palace and rents a waltz instruction tape from employee Todd...Ben is crushed when he learns Katz has already learned to waltz...and a tiff ensues. =>Later, Katz suggests they waltz together as a way of making up, which they do, until Ben dips his dad and drops him." (http://www.ericdsnider.com/katz.html)

After the pair dance together they make up and restore the equilibrium of the episode. The wedding is never seen.

Episode 605 'Ben's Partay' (O.A.D: 13 July 1999) follows a narrative flow of related events, but does not follow the familiar status quo, error, or event and a return to familiar status quo. This episode is unusual as it ends on a rather negative note, setting a different tone from the other episodes in the series:

After hearing from some old friends, who are in town for a short visit, Ben decides to throw a party, =>but Katz isn't invited, despite his offer to provide the musical entertainment. =>Ben invites Laura and Todd, who both decline. =>Dr Katz later meets Laura when he is hanging out at the bookstore => Todd turns up late to the party to find out that Ben has been copying tapes from the video store. (He is also the only guest at the party at that point) =>When Todd's friends turn up, the party gets a bit out of hand with Ben forced outside onto the fire escape to get away from the chaos=> he ends up locked out, and hasn't had a good time.

The ritual error in *Dr Katz* is usually made by Ben, with the lesson either imparted by (or actually resolved) by Dr Katz; this reinforces their relationship as father and son. Despite the numerous scene changes the narrative follows Marc's formula, however it is this use of time, and the Retroscripting technique, which marks out *Dr Katz*'s difference from the other anicoms.

King of the Hill

Episode 60 (Season 3) 'As Old As the Hills' (O.A.D: 18 May 1999) follows the sitcom narrative until the end, which instead of a resolution, features a cliff-hanger to be resolved in the next episode. This use of cliff-hangers is a device employed often in season finales of live action sitcoms, and is common in *King*

of the Hill, particularly between seasons. This use of a live action sitcom convention reinforces the show's generic status as an anicom:

The Hills celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary with a party => friends and Hank's home video reminds Peggy how old they have gotten. => To give Hank and Peggy some time alone Bobby goes to stay with Cotton, which he hopes will be his grandfather's last chance to spoil him before Didi's baby comes => but Cotton sees it as an opportunity for Bobby to fill in for his pregnant wife's chores. => Luanne had arranged to go away camping with friends, but when the trip is cancelled, she sneaks back to the house where she hides for the whole weekend. => After a depression fuelled tequila session, Peggy convinces Hank that they need to spice up their lives by skydiving. Hank jumps and loves it but Peggy is reluctant. => Meanwhile, with Cotton out, Didi goes into labour and Bobby has to drive her to the hospital, in Arlen, he doesn't know where the nearest hospital is. => He ends up having to be her birthing partner. => Back at the sky diving, Peggy finally musters the courage to jump, but both of her chutes fail. A season ending cliff-hanger sees Hank watch helplessly as Peggy falls to the ground.

The start of season four saw the continuation of the cliff-hanger from the season three finale. In that episode we saw that Peggy survived her fall but is immobilised in a body cast. *Episode 62 (Season 4) 'Cotton's Plot' (O.A.D: 3 October 1999)* continues the story with Peggy beginning her rehabilitation program, out of her cast but in a wheelchair. She has difficulty dealing with exercises set for her and feels sorry for herself but Hank's father Cotton decides to help out:

=>When Cotton taunts Peggy when she falls out of her chair and treats her as though she were a soldier, she begins to respond to his harsh treatment. => Her rehab progresses well with Cotton constantly telling her stories of his war adventures. => He is trying to apply to be buried in the veteran's cemetery, however his chances are almost blown when Peggy realises that his stories contradict each other so he must be making it all up. => Disappointed in her new mentor she gives up hope in him, until Hank reminds her that even if some of his details are mixed up he did serve, and lost his shins in the process. => This inspires Peggy once more and she helps Cotton to get his 'plot' in the veterans' cemetery. => this episode resolves both Peggy's issue of feeling sorry for herself, which she overcomes and manages her rehabilitation, as well as Cotton's problem trying to secure a veteran's burial plot.

Episode 66 'A Beer Can Named Desire' (O.A.D: 14 November 1999) begins as so many do with the boys standing in the alley drinking beer:

=> In one marked can of Alamo beer is a winning opportunity to throw a football to win $1m, or have a football star throw it for you for $100,000 instead. => Hank wins and decides to try his hand at throwing himself for the million. After much practise the family sets of to New Orleans for the game, allowing Bill to tag along and rediscover his Cajun roots. => While staying with his family, Bill is seduced by three of his cousins; one of home is related by blood, the other by marriage (though they are all widows). => After sleeping with all of them he is asked to leave and catches up with the Hills on their way home. => Meanwhile back at the game, Hank decides to let his idol 'Dandy' Don Meredith (playing himself) throw for him. => Don misses and Hank is so mad he tackles Don. =>

Later they talk and Hank tries the throw when no one is around, he gets it in but decides he is pleased to have had the honour of meeting a football legend, so doesn't mind too much about the money. => again we see the resolution of the two parallel plots, Hank meets his idol, and Bill finds his family, despite the unsatisfactory result for both.

Peggy's longing for change, seen in episode 60 returns in *episode 77 'Bill Of Sales' (O.A.D: 12 March 2000)*:

Bored with her current job, Peggy decides to answer and ad to start her own business. =>It turns out to be a pyramid scheme but Peggy continues, trying to draft Luanne and Hank in to her sales team. =>The sales are poor until Bill intervenes trying to impress Peggy and sells all of her merchandise. Peggy hires Bill and his skill as salesman takes them to the annual sales convention in San Antonio. =>When Bill increases their chances of going to the Nationals, Peggy compliments him with a peck on the cheek. =>Bill becomes furious and quits, leaving Peggy with poor sales again. =>Hank points out that Bill is only used to poor treatment so Peggy begins to act like a drill instructor to get him back to work. He works really hard and Peggy is pleased until she realises that he is injured from working too much. =>Unable to continue taking advantage of him, she fires him. =>He points out that he thinks it's a scam, she agrees, but thinks they had a good time. Their friendship, as well as the equilibrium is restored.

The ritual errors in *King of the Hill* are of a more ideological nature than that of its contemporaries. We have seen that the situations are generally conflicts, either generational, or gender based. The issues are of a fairly serious nature and are approached with subtlety, without the use of slapstick or visual gags which so

many other sitcoms rely on. This does not necessarily suggest that the show is better but this, like the use of time in *Dr Katz* is used to mark out *King of the Hill*'s difference within the genre.

South Park

The narrative in *South Park* is similar to *Dr Katz* with numerous short scenes, which often appear complicated, however the overall episode follows the sitcom narrative. This is established in the first episode *'Cartman Gets An Anal Probe' (O.A.D: 18 August 1997):*

=> the boys wait for the school bus => Cartman arrives late and tells them about his dream of visitors. After telling a variety of people, and hearing similar strange stories, the boys conclude that Cartman was abducted by aliens. Meanwhile Kyle's little brother is abducted by the aliens. In trying to reach the aliens, Kenny is killed. => the boys use Cartman to communicate with the visitors to get Ike back. They succeed and discover that the aliens meant them no harm. => the boys are at the bus stop waiting to go to school, though minus Kenny.

In the special Halloween episode *'Pinkeye' (O.A.D: 29 October 1997)*, the narrative follows Marc's formula, but with a number of the townspeople dead at the end. The equilibrium is restored by the start of the next episode.

=>"The first Halloween episode starts off with the failure of the Mir Space Station, which crashes right on Kenny. An ambulance comes and takes his body off to the morgue. The boys start to brag about their Halloween costumes. => At the morgue, a freak accident involving a bottle of Worcestershire occurs, and

next thing you know Kenny is a member of the undead. => Kenny breaks free and wanders off into the night."[98] => the boys discover how to reverse the effects of zombie Kenny, but have killed a number of others in the meantime.

In episode 109 'Starvin Marvin' (O.A.D: 19 November 1997) the boys learn a lesson about thanksgiving:

=> the boys are watching television together. => they send away for a watch, in response to an ad campaigning to help starving Ethiopians. Instead of the watch, the boys get and actual Ethiopian boy. 'Marvin' stays with the boys and when the authorities come to take him back they get Cartman by mistake. Meanwhile a genetic experiment has gone wrong and turkeys are invading the town. => Cartman helps the Ethiopians and manages to get home. The turkeys are defeated and Marvin takes them back to Ethiopia. => everyone is returned to their rightful home, though as usual Kenny is dead again.

The ritual error in this episode is largely made by Cartman, however he does resolve the situation himself and returns home. As we saw in *The Flintstones* Cartman, like Fred, rarely remembers the lesson in the next episode.

South Park's themes are varied throughout the life of the show, however in *episode 204 'Ike's Wee Wee' (O.A.D: 20 May 1998)* the importance of family is the featured theme:

=>Kyle's little brother is going to have a Briss =>the boys discover what a Briss is and decide to send Ike away=> they make a dummy to fool Kyle's parents, but when the dummy is torn apart by a dog, everyone thinks that Ike is dead. => at

[98] (http://southparkstudios.com/show/guide.html)

the funeral Kyle learns that Ike is adopted, annoyed Kyle reveals Ike's true whereabouts. => Ike is found and returns home. =>Kyle learns the 'true meaning of family' when Ike is affectionate to him. The equilibrium is restored.

The nature of the ritual error is, like *King of the Hill* often a fairly serious ideological issue, but the show uses the innocence of the children to question them. It also features a combination of slapstick, visual gags, parody and satire in its approach to the issues.

Futurama

The narrative structure of *Futurama* conforms to the generic conventions of the sitcom. The first episode has already been discussed at length earlier in the chapter, here I will simply apply Marc's formula to the synopsis.

Episode 1 'Space Pilot 3000' (O.A.D: 28 March 1999)

=>"After an accidental cryogenic freezing, Fry awakens at the dawn of the year 3000. =>With the help of his two new friends, a degenerate robot named Bender and a beautiful one-eyed alien named Leela, Fry defies his life assignment as a delivery boy. =>He tracks down his great, great etc. nephew, Professor Farnsworth, =>who hires the three to work for his intergalactic delivery service. It's a brave new world and Fry is in for the time of his life." As this episode is the pilot the end has no familiar status quo to restore.

In episode 4 'Love's Labours Lost In Space' (O.A.D: 13 April 1999) Leela is the focus of the episode and as such both makes and learns the ritual error:

=>"On a mission to save endangered animals from a collapsing planet, =>lonely Leela meets legendary starship Captain Zapp Brannigan – who (at least in his own opinion) is the universe's greatest ladies man." => Brannigan refuses to help save the animals so Leela, Fry and Bender do it themselves. => one of the creatures, Nibbler becomes Leela's pet, though he eats the rest of the animals.=> running out of fuel, the crew are in trouble, until they discover that Nibbler can 'provide' fuel. => the crew return home, Leela has a new companion and writes in her log.

The situation, or problem in the episode is resolved but the show has developed with the addition of new characters, which will recur throughout the rest of the series. This episode is quite unusual with Leela making the ritual error as it is usually Fry who makes the error and Leela who helps him resolve it.

Episode 6 'A Fishfull Of Dollars' (O.A.D: 27 April 1999)

"Fry discovers he's a billionaire because his savings have been accruing interest for 1000 years. => Caught up in the excitement of his riches, he squanders his fortune to buy an unopened can of anchovies – extinct since the year 2200. =>What he doesn't realise is that Mom, the head of a mega-conglomerate, will do anything – even use Pamela Anderson's head in a jar – to get her hands on those anchovies." => Mom tricks Fry into losing all of his money, but he ultimately refuses to give up his anchovies, a relic of his lost past.=> when he serves them at the end of the episode, no-one likes them, 'just like in the past' remarks Fry.

The ritual error is again made by Fry, though in this case a thousand years in the past, in *episode 12 'When Aliens Attack' (O.A.D: 7 November 1999)*:

=>"The Omicrons threaten to destroy the earth if they can't see the last episode of a lost 20th century television series 'Single Female Lawyer' starring an unmarried human female, who wears very short miniskirts, struggling to succeed in a human man's world. => Because someone destroyed the last episode by spilling beer on the transmitter (think Fry) the crew from Planet Express must deliver their version of 'Single Female Lawyer'. (DVD Season 1 box set, 2002, 20th Century Fox) =>the crew manages to pull off the trick and the aliens leave, satisfied with the result. The crew has learned some valuable lessons about the formulaic nature of television thanks to Fry.

In all of the *Futurama* episodes, while the problem of that particular episode is resolved the familiar status quo is not necessarily restored to the same as the beginning. However this is the case in many of the shows we have examined, and is also the case in contemporary live action sitcom. The use of an occasional ensemble cast allows the show to focus on different characters and vary the plots accordingly. In doing so, the ritual error can be made by a variety of characters, however it is usually made by Fry in his attempts to understand the future.

Family Guy

The prominence of Peter in the role of 'buffoon' or fool in *Family Guy* is revealed through the ritual error which he constantly makes. *Episode 2 'I Never Met The Dead Man' (O.A.D: 11 April 1999)* features Peter's error almost immediately:

=>"While teaching Meg to drive, Peter crashes into a satellite dish and knocks out the city's cable. => He goes crazy without television, until Lois suggests he spend more time with his family. =>This plan backfires when Peter drives his family nuts. => Meanwhile after Lois forces Stewie to eat his broccoli, he attempts to destroy all vegetables by building a weather control device. (Erik Estrada makes a guest voice appearance)." =>the equilibrium is restored when the television service is resumed and Peter and the family can return to their regular viewing habits.

In episode 2 the situation is resolved by a third party, with no lesson being learned by Peter. This is also the case in *episode 3 'Mind Over Murder' (O.A.D: 25 April 1999)*:

=> "When Peter goes to Chris' soccer game, he inadvertently punches a woman he thought was a man. => Restless under house arrest, Peter turns the basement into a bar and Lois ends up stealing the show. => Meanwhile, Stewie attempts to create a time machine to avoid teething pain. (Erik Estrada makes a guest voice appearance)." => when the period of house arrest is over Peter returns to his regular life and Lois' new 'fame' is over. Thus the equilibrium is restored.

In *Episode 5 'A Hero Sits Next Door'* (O.A.D: 2 May 1999) Peter once again makes the error, but this time it is resolved by both Joe and Lois:

=>"When a bubbly new family moves next door, Peter gets annoyed. =>Lois becomes fast friends with Debbie, Meg tries to pick up on son Kyle and Peter is forced to invite Joe to play on his company baseball team. => But when Joe

shows up to the game in a wheelchair and wins the crowds' heart with slick manoeuvres and winning plays, =>Peter decides he wants to be a hero too." => Peter gets involved in a bank robbery in his attempt to be a hero but he makes things worse. => Joe saves the day => Lois explains how much of a hero Peter is to his family.

The themes of family togetherness, friendship and peer pressure are the focus of *episode 12 'Love Thy Trophy' (O.A.D: 14 March 2000)*:

=>"When their *Who's the Boss* float takes top prize in the Quahog Harvest Day Parade, the neighbourhood literally goes to war over who gets custody of the trophy. => Meanwhile, in an effort to get big tips at her new waitressing job, Meg tells customers that Stewie is her illegitimate crack baby. =>When family services investigate, and find the Griffin home in the middle of a war zone, they take custody of Stewie. => Once everyone finds out that Stewie's in foster care, the neighbourhood declares peace and plots a rescue mission." => Stewie is returned and the neighbours make peace with each other, thus restoring the equilibrium.

In this episode there are ritual errors made by nearly all of the main characters, but the lesson is also learned by all of them when the Griffin family and their neighbours work together to resolve the biggest problem of Stewie being taken into care. *Family Guy* is consistent in its use of the sitcom narrative throughout the series. Its use of the domestic setting is quite similar to *The Simpsons* but as the earlier section revealed, the frequent use of television references above any other cultural or social commentary marks out its difference from its domestic sitcom counterparts, live action and animated.

Home Movies

Home Movies does not always follow the sitcom narrative. While it features the resolution of a problem which occurs in the episode, the end does not always specify the restoration of the equilibrium. For example, in the episode below the focus is on Brendon's problem but the end of the episode finds McGuirk on the phone, in reference to a very short subplot which is not entirely resolved. The episode also features a theme of family, or rather the absence, and eventual reunion of a parent which occurs throughout the series.

Episode 207 'Dad' (O.A.D: 17 February 2002)

=>Brendon is finally going to meet his father and spend the weekend with him. =>After a slow start, and some confusion over a 'hands – free' phone call, they begin to get along with a plan to start the weekend at the zoo. =>Once they arrive they meet Brendon's dad's girlfriend, Linda. She seems younger than Andrew, and constantly complains about her day. =>Later, back at Andrew's apartment Linda complains again after she finds out that Brendon has been using her stuff, and she and Andrew argue. The next morning they argue again and it seems like they don't get on too well. =>But later, back at the zoo, Andrew tells Brendon of his intention to propose to Linda. =>Paula decides to invite the couple to dinner where Brendon takes the opportunity to show his father the new film he has been working on. =>The 'historical' drama featuring a couple like Anthony and Cleopatra who have a fight which bears an uncanny resemblance to the ones Brendon witnessed between Linda and his father. =>Despite yet another argument at dinner the engagement is still on. =>Meanwhile, at soccer practise, Coach McGuirk introduces 'Eddie' a special child who needs special

attention. =>Later we learn that Eddie moved away, and McGuirk is looking into being a big brother, but he wants a sick kid.

As in the other shows, the equilibrium is usually restored in the next episode. There are of course exceptions where the show will, like *King of the Hill* start the next episode where the previous one ended.

The theme of family, and specifically the father-son relationship is developed in *episode 212 'Pizza Club' (O.A.D: 24 March 2002)*:

=>Brendon and his dad have formed the 'pizza club' where they meet to have pizza together. =>McGuirk is jealous of Brendon's new relationship with his father and wants to join the club. He turns up to the pizza place in an attempt to be invited to join, but with no luck. =>He tries to win Brendon's affections by giving him a bike, but his dad already got him one, and anyway the bike belongs to Mr Lynch. =>Meanwhile Dwayne's band is in a local competition and Brendon decides to make a documentary, (to be around his crush Cynthia). => Despite the advice from his dad, =>Brendon fails to impress Cynthia, but Dwayne's band wins the contest. =>Paula has also taken an interest in the filmmaking, and keeps getting in the way. In an attempt to appease the acting bug, they give her a small walk on part in the current film project, it seems to work. =>McGuirk tries to form his own pizza club with Walter and Perry but discovers they are both lactose intolerant and can't eat it. => After an argument with Brendon at soccer, McGuirk is finally accepted into the club.

In episode 210 'History' (O.A.D: 10 March 2002) the narrative is divided between the actual events of the episode, Brendon's issues at school and the movie he is working on:

=>"The classic "Starboy" episode! Brendon's sci-fi creation, Starboy, with his side-kick, the Captain of Outer Space must stop the arch-fiend George Washington, Annie Oakley, and Picasso from destroying the earth with a terrifying weapon: Washington's cat Mr Pants. =>Whilst in real life, Brendon finds himself wondering why he is failing history..." (http://www.tvtome.com/HomeMovies/guide.html)

The ritual error of the episode is essentially Brendon's failure in school however the resolution of the episode is the success of his movie character 'Starboy' rather than his own. As the main character in the series, it is usually Brendon who makes the error, though there is often a sub plot featuring Coach McGuirk making his own error. In episode 211 'Writer's Block' (O.A.D: March 2002) the errors, or problems of McGuirk and Brendon are juxtaposed with scenes of Brendon's mother succeeding in her work, however as their situation is resolved, Paula ends the episode having failed to continue her success (she now suffers from the writers block that Brendon had):

=>The school writer's fair is coming up and Brendon has a bad case of writer's block. =>His mom has no such problem as her romance story progresses well until the end of the episode. =>Meanwhile Coach McGuirk has been having problems sleeping and ends up in a sleep study at the local university. =>He thinks it's a bad idea until he finds out how much money he can make as a test subject. With a DVD player in sight he tries to go without sleep for as long as

possible but in the end collapses at the clinic into a sound sleep groaning 'DVD'.=> Brendon doesn't cure his writer's block but the group manage to perform at the fair regardless.

The narrative structure of *Home Movies* varies from episode to episode as does the nature of the ritual error. While it generally conforms to the generic conventions, the shows use of continuing stories enables progression of both plot and characterisation. This is common in live action sitcom in the 1990s, particularly in shows such as *Friends*. *Home Movies* then is demonstrating genre progression which is parallel to the live action sitcom.

The individual shows all conform to the generic verisimilitude of the sitcom, though each show does so in quite different ways reinforcing Neale's notion of the importance of difference in genre.(2000 p.56) For a genre to both progress and continue to be accepted and categorised by the audience, it must be capable of variation while working within an identifiable framework. The anicom cycle of the 1990s has demonstrated this progression both through their difference from each other, as well as the difference from the anicoms which preceded them. The audience's role in genre classification and this negotiation of generic variation is, as we saw in the literature, crucial. Too much variation and the show is rejected for failing to adequately meet the expectation of the audience, even if the audience is open to generic change. An example of the audiences role in the negotiation of generic verisimilitude can be seen in the response of *The Simpsons* fans to plot development and narrative inconsistencies.

'Nitpicking "The Simpsons": Critique and Continuity in Constructed Realities'[99]

The popularity of *The Simpsons* has grown considerably from its small 'cult' fan base when it was produced for *The Tracey Ullman Show* to the show's huge mainstream success as a series. However, despite this movement into a broad commercial realm, there is still an exclusive community of fans who pride themselves on knowing more than the 'mass audience' or 'general fan'. Using examples from discussions found one of the most popular websites devoted to the series, "The Simpsons Archive" (http://www.snpp.com), this section examines the fans negotiation of generic verisimilitude.

Like many television show's, "The Simpsons" has a number of websites devoted to it, ranging from the official site sponsored by Fox, the shows television network, to sites set up and run by fans, with no official endorsement by the producers of the series. The latter allow fans of the program to contribute to the compilation of a thorough reference resource of episode guides and other databases. One means by which these fans demonstrate their knowledge of the program is through fault finding, or 'nitpicking' - citing their observations about various aspects of the series. This 'nitpicking' can be seen as part of an ongoing negotiation over 'ownership' between the show's fans and the show's creators.

Fault finding occurs by means of discussion groups on topics ranging from the story arcs and individual plots to the show's animation style and guest appearances. These discussion groups provide a mediated forum for fans to share their opinions on individual episodes and the quality of the show's writing and to

[99] This was published as a paper in *Animation Journal* Volume 11, 2003 – see Appendix C.

share information on upcoming plot development. As well as providing a reference guide for viewers of the show, the contributors, as fans themselves, are able to engage with each other. This opportunity allows the fans to establish a sense of their shared ownership of the series, at the same time strengthening the fan culture surrounding it.

The Simpsons combines a number of different types of comedy, from slapstick and visual gags to satire and parody. It is in appreciating these various types of humour that a potential divide in the audience occurs—between the viewer who enjoys the comedy and slapstick nature of the show and the 'knowing fan' who recognizes the self-conscious intertextuality of the jokes. Jim Collins suggests that such intertextuality is the hallmark of "quality television" and implicit in postmodern popular culture. (1992 p.35) Recognition of the references, or a "knowingness," as Andrew Tolson describes it, "reinforces our credentials as members of the mass mediated world culture." (1996 p.13)

Executive Producer Mike Scully suggests that there are two groups in the show's audience, using his own family to illustrate those who laugh at the 'low brow' and those who also appreciate the 'intellectual'. He explains, "I love the mix of intellectual and low brow humor . . . I tend to laugh more at some of the verbal jokes, while the kids will be laughing at Homer falling down the stairs."[100] Although Scully refers specifically to children, a similar notion can be used to describe the general audience of viewers. This segmentation creates a kind of hierarchy, which helps to ex plain the types of 'fandom' one finds operating in relation to the show.

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[100] Scully, quoted in Jon Horowitz, "Mmm . . . Television: A Study of the Audience of "The Simpsons" (1999), *"The Simpsons" Archive*. Online at http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/jh.paper.html.

Pierre Bourdieu created a model that suggests that there is a hierarchy of audience, within which one finds a struggle for varying levels of 'sophistication'. (1993 p.49)[101] On top of the audience hierarchy lies another level, that of the artist. Though Bourdieu discusses audiences related to products such as art or poetry, the concept of a hierarchy also can be used here to classify viewers of *The Simpsons* into levels. They can be thought of as mass audience, general fan, exclusive fan, and artist/creator.

In Bourdieu's example, fans are at the top of the audience hierarchy, but are constantly striving to reach the next hierarchical level, that of the artist. Accordingly, atop the hierarchies related to *The Simpsons*, we find the series' writers, producers, directors and other creative personnel, all of whom function as the equivalent of Bourdieu's 'artist'. Fans of *The Simpsons* try to assert their place in the exclusive 'artist' group; they attempt this by keenly seeking out subtle details related to the 'constructed reality' of the show and demonstrating this knowledge. Their information forms the basis of discourse about continuity and program structure, which translates into 'exclusive' knowledge demonstrated on the website. That activity assures their high position in the audience hierarchy, suggesting that they are heading toward the artist level.[102]

Fans who participate in such nitpicking engage in two types of critical behaviour: first, they notice all of the deliberate cultural and satirical references found in an episode, matching the producers' knowledge, and second, they spot apparently

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[101] Bourdieu's divisions are 'no audience', 'mass audience', 'intellectual audience' and 'bourgeois audience'. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), 49.

[102] These concepts are discussed by Tulloch and Jenkins, in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998, 147.

unintentional continuity errors, marking their superiority over other general viewers and the show's producers. So, as part of their discourse on continuity, the fans closely monitor any mistakes that have been made throughout the life of the series. These observations range from simple discrepancies, such as shifts in a character's hair colour or a change in the Simpson's address, to a major change in characteristic. For example, eight year-old Lisa is a vegetarian, the subject of a whole episode, *Lisa the Vegetarian* (1995); however, as a fan has pointed out, in a later episode, *My Sister, My Sitter* (1997), it appears she has meat on her plate.

Intense interest in the production details of *The Simpsons* has led to the formation of online forums dedicated to 'nitpicking'. One of them can be found within a popular website, "The Simpsons Archive," which was launched online in 1994 and receives millions of hits per month.[103] "The Simpsons Archive" includes sections called 'Episode Capsules', where detailed synopses are produced, as well as a variety of sub-sections, such as "did you notice . . ." for noting movie, television and other cultural references; "animation goofs" for posting errors in continuity and in the animation itself; and "comments and other observations." The website also invites detailed critique of entire seasons and comparisons to *Futurama*, Groening's other prime-time animated sitcom. In its various forums, "The Simpsons Archive" actively promotes the distinction between the mass audience, general fan and exclusive fan in its encouragement of submissions—even providing a guide to ensure that the appropriate style is followed. A

[103] Though there are general television sites, such as jumptheshark.com and televisionwithoutpity.com, that feature the same sections, "The Simpsons Archive" focuses exclusively on the series.

specific section of the site, "Tell Us How Much of a Fan You Are," allows each fan to describe his or her own status.[104]

Fans use the website to showcase their knowledge of the satirical references found in 'real life': American culture, society and politics, as well as other media, including film, television and print comics. The fans' ability to recognize these references establishes their position above the mass audience. Those 'general fans' whose nitpicking is submitted and accepted into the archive are elevated to the higher position of 'exclusive fan' in the hierarchy. These submissions are, as Bourdieu suggests, "opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld." (1984 p.57)

This 'rank' is indeed upheld as many contributors become recognizable when they contribute to multiple Episode Capsules. As a result, they are seen as 'authorities' to the general fans who use the site only as a reference source, particularly if the name recurs many times. A random survey of the Episode Capsules reveals the name of one contributor, David Hall, in six out of seven sections viewed. For example, one entry reads, "Dave Hall observes that when Patty drives off, there appears to be street lamps (seen from the rear-view mirror), but from Skinner's point of view, there are none to be found."[105] Hall's entry demonstrates an analysis of the verisimilitude of the mise-en-scene, a criticism related to elements of realism in the episode. The concept of realism is

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[104] "Tell Us How Much of a Fan You Are," *The Simpsons Archive.* Online at www.snpp.com/guides/geekcode.html .

[105] David Hall, *"The Simpsons" Archive.* Online at www.snpp.com/episodes/ 7F15.html.

an important one in this paper, as it is the fans' sense of the Simpson family's reality that motivates many of their nitpicking responses to the episodes.

Realism and Constructed Realities

If we return to Corner's notion of realism (1998)[106] we see that in *The Simpsons*, the medium of animation and the character designs themselves work against a true 'verisimilitude' in the series. Clearly, characters that have yellow skin and pointy hair cannot be considered to be 'like the real'. On the other hand, the cultural references and even the 'real life' issues (such as poverty, infidelity, war, and nuclear power) dealt with in the series create a strong sense of being 'about the real'.

Abercrombie, et al. argue that there are three features which suggest realism in fictional television: the physical nature of the television as a "window on the world"; the narrative, "which has rationally ordered connections between events and characters [. . .] organized by rational principles"; and "the concealment of the production process." (1996 p.27) Normally, television series work to make the production process 'invisible' to the audience. However, the writers of *The Simpsons* refer directly to this notion of 'concealment of production' in several episodes of the show. One example occurs in 'Mom and Pop Art' (1999), where Homer is visiting the local art gallery and is critical of an artwork by *The Simpsons* creator Matt Groening. After he makes his comments, a large pencil appears as if to erase him, as the animator tried to do to Daffy Duck in *Duck*

[106] As discussed earlier in the chapter Corner contends that the notion of realism can be broken down into, "the project of verisimilitude[...] like the real" and "the project of reference [...] about the real" (1998 p.70)

Amuck (1953, dir. Chuck Jones), but the audience soon discovers that the pencil is merely a large part of a sculptor's installation.

In terms of television series, one can also add another measure of realism, that of 'continuity' (maintaining the real over time). If there are lapses in the continuity of a series, its credibility as real also lapses, thus enabling 'nitpicking'. In terms of "The Simpsons", the fans' observations of both intended satire and any continuity errors made are well known by the writers—and even have been subject of references within the series. An example occurs in the Halloween episode *Treehouse of Horror X* (1999), which features the popular live-action adventure series character Xena, from *Xena, Warrior Princess*. The fans at a sci-fi convention ask questions about glaring continuity errors in the show, to which the actress repeatedly responds, "A wizard did it." This comment on verisimilitude, though sarcastic, asserts the writers' control of the show over the fans. Xena puts the fans 'in their place', dismissing their observations and basically telling them not to question the writers.

In a season eleven episode, 'Behind the Laughter' (2000), the writers address some common complaints made by fans. The show parodies the VH1 music documentary format of *Behind the Music*, where members of bands, generally past their prime, are interviewed candidly about their successes and failures. In the episode, the Simpson family is the subject of a documentary as the stars of a weekly sitcom (about their Family's antics). It is part parody of the music program and part self-reflexive criticism, critiquing many elements of the show which the fans have criticized over the years.

The most heavily criticized change to most television shows is the addition of a new character. As Grote suggests, most people think, "any change is a sign of desperation, not a sign of plot development." (1984 p.71) Indeed, the attempt to add new life to an old show is a technique used many times in live-action sitcoms, with the result often worse than the original problem.[107] A commentary on this technique is included in an episode of *The Simpsons* called 'The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show' (1997), which also addresses fan culture.

In the episode, a new character is included in the cartoon within the series, "The Itchy and Scratchy Show." At the same time, a new 'house guest' is added to the Simpson household: the character 'Roy', who parodies the 'Fonz' from long running sitcom *Happy Days*. The new character, 'Poochie' in the "Itchy & Scratchy Show" is included when the network sees the ratings falling. They search for new voice talent and end up hiring Homer. Before the show is aired, Homer attends a fan convention and is overwhelmed by the question session. Like 'Xena' in the aforementioned Halloween episode, he cannot deal with the level of detail in the questions. Rather than make up an answer, he simply declares that the conference-goers are geeks, presumably because he thinks they are taking it too seriously, another direct comment to the show's fans.

While the 'Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie' episode was clearly parodying *Happy Days*, it refers to its own generic status and form, "Any view of genre in animation must be understood as closely related to animation's ability to

[107] The attempt to add new life to an old show is a technique used many times in live-action sitcoms, with the result often worse than the original problem. One of the most notable cases of this was in the American sitcom "Mork and Mindy" when after several years of declining ratings; the writers added a new character in the shape of Mork's adult, alien baby. This move proved fatal to the success of the show, and as a result was cancelled.

announce itself as its own text, which self-evidently interrogates the parameters of its own uses of generic traits and tropes" (Wells 2002b p.66). This interrogation occurs frequently in *The Simpsons* and its anicom contemporaries. The episode also included an acknowledgement of fans in the heavily satirical reference to fan culture at the convention. This reference was met with mixed and often extreme reactions from the 'nitpickers' on "The Simpsons Archive." In the review section of the Episode Capsule, some fans seemed happy, even flattered, that the writers were paying attention to them, as the following comments suggest.

"Hmm. I guess the writers read this newsgroup after all. Eh? . . . "

"Well, there was an episode [aimed] directly at us, the hardcore fans . . . the portrayal of the fans was a little too on-target . . . And they're absolutely right."

"The scenes in the comic book store can ONLY be fully appreciated by us 'hardcore' fans . . . I think it finally proves that the writers ARE reading this newsgroup . . . it's always nice to see yourself on TV."

"This episode takes a terrific look at the often dicey relationship between a show and its viewers."[108]

Significantly, these comments make distinctions between the authors themselves, the 'hardcore' fans, and the general 'viewers'. By commenting on the inclusion of direct references to themselves, the 'fans' reassert their rank in the hierarchy,

[108] The contributors cited are Dale G. Abersold, Jonathan S. Haas, Sean J. O'Neal, Benjamin J. Robinson. "The Simpsons" Archive. Online at http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F12.html

above the 'mass audience' as they are at a high enough level to be recognized by those at the top.

The above writers enjoy the recognition. However, some fans were not so impressed, as demonstrated in their contributions to the same review section on the site.

"The jokes clearly prove the writers can't differentiate those who are annoyed with minor details like animation flaws from those who notice a decline [. . .] of the show [. . .] The episode was an outrage. It was very inconsiderate of the fans . . . "

"My, oh my. When the writers spend a whole episode pointing at you, a mere paragraph seems small as a reply. Were they bluntly asking us to shut the hell up ("you owe them")?"[109]

Again, the 'fans' are making their own distinctions in the hierarchy, differentiating between the levels. These comments also suggest that the contributors felt as though the writers were imposing their position in the hierarchy upon them, as though they were being reprimanded for criticizing the top rank, as Homer does in *Mom and Pop Art*.

The fans, then, enter into a further discussion with the writers through the episodes themselves. After an episode airs, it is followed by fan response. The writers then reply to the fans through another episode and so the process

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[109] The writers were identified as Ondre Lombard and "Yours Truly." "The Simpsons" Archive. Online at http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F12.html

continues. This ongoing dialogue locates the fans at a higher position, as they have become part of the process of production of the show. In this process, the fans never really achieve any 'real' status change—though they engage with the process regardless.

This dialogue has been described by Henry Jenkins as a conflict "which has had to be actively fought or at least negotiated between fans and producers in almost every media fandom." (1992 p. 32) As Jenkins suggests, this conflict is a common one between the fan and producer. The web-site becomes a site of negotiation between different hierarchical levels, as fans, "unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons." (p.18) The cultural canon is formed not only by the show itself, but also by the creation of "The Simpsons Archive" as a canon of web-based resource material. This negotiation between all levels of the audience hierarchy ultimately leads to creations of a new form of authorship within the interactive space of "The Simpsons Archive" website. In that sense, fans attain the level of artist in some respect, insofar as they are authoring significant texts that enter into the cultural arena.

This case study of the role of the audience in generic classification and variation has demonstrated that by conforming to the generic conventions of the sitcom, *The Simpsons* is not only perceived by audiences as a sitcom, or anicom, but engaged with to such an extent that it has created an entire 'fandom' around it.

This chapter has argued that in the 1990s saw a new cycle of the anicom, but unlike the 1960s cycle this one has lasted well beyond the decade in which it began. The anicoms of the 1990s (and into 2000s) present a variety and diversity

within the anicom genre enabling the genre to progress, while maintaining audience interest. I have suggested that the perception of the anicom, by both audiences and networks has influenced the success of shows, some of which have been more successful (in terms of longevity) than others.

Chapter 7 - Conclusion

The thesis began by introducing the key areas which would be examined, the most important of which was the question of the generic status of what I have termed the anicom. The thesis examined the development of the anicom within the field of animation studies, which had largely neglected this particular form. Rebecca Farley, for instance has argued that "conventional explanations of the success of those few cartoons which did make it in prime time are unsatisfactory, telling us little about the texts themselves or the way the function(ed) within the industrial apparatus" (2003 p.104). To address this, the thesis also considered the audience of the animated sitcom, generally produced for adults, and the importance of the discourse between the audience and producers and its impact on the form's genre classification. The importance of the anicom to both animation studies, and the increasing popularity of animation as a whole, was addressed throughout.

It was apparent that there is a lack of a coherent canon of literature surrounding animation studies, which, as my research has demonstrated, is due to a number of reasons. Firstly the term 'animation' itself has always been difficult to define particularly now with the increasing use of animated effects within live action film such as *The Matrix* (1999) and *Star Wars Episode I* (1999), combining the two forms and confusing the terms. But perhaps more significantly for my purposes, there has been a tradition amongst animation critics and historians of dismissing television animation as a lower form of animation, less worthy than that produced for theatrical release, or without comparable artistic purpose. Animation has long been marginalised in comparison to film studies, and even to television studies. Animation theorists appear unwilling to examine all aspects

of the form which does not help address this incoherence. The networks themselves, as we have seen have contributed to this problem. Again, as Farley suggests, the tendency for networks to assume a clear cut definition between 'adults' and 'children' is one of the key problems in analysing the animation in question. I would agree with this entirely, as I have already demonstrated the importance of the audience to the generic classification, perception and its success. It is an important area that needs to be addressed further, however this would require detailed qualitative research.

In her discussion of the 'animatedness' of *The Flintstones* and *Ren & Stimpy* as a case study of their success in prime time she suggests that the element of 'play' present in both shows contributes to their success, but also their potential downfall. "From the point of view of the networks, there is always a danger that an unruly show will go too far and alienate the audience." (p.161) Farley is thus suggesting that this, in part, explains the decline of the form – or at least the lack of sustained success – however this does not take into account the generic discourse of the sitcom which has perhaps enabled the shows in my case study to maintain larger success.[110] My thesis has at least addressed this in part, by providing a full account of the historical and cultural development of a neglected research area.

By looking to film and television studies, and in particular genre theory, I identified the key generic characteristics of which informed my theoretical framework, and was used to analyse the animated sitcom. The anicoms were examined on their narrative structures, characterisation, situation and setting,

[110]Sustained success in the anicom: *The Simpsons* – 14 years; *South Park* – 7 years; *King of the Hill* - 7 years; *Dr Katz* – 6 years; *Home Movies* – 5 years.

social and cultural verisimilitude and the scheduling and network influence. These characteristics enabled me to assess their generic status and any variation within the form.

In chapter three, through the examination of the anicoms of the 1960s I was able to establish an emerging form which conformed to the generic conventions of the live action sitcoms which *The Flintstones, Top Cat* and *The Jetsons* had looked to for inspiration and a formula for success to emulate. The shows paralleled their live action counterparts with their 'situations' and character types. However in the anicoms we began to see a generic development in characterisation with the use of ensemble casts in interchangeable roles. This would also be seen in live action sitcoms in the 1970s such as *Taxi* and *M*A*S*H.* We also saw a change in the hero role, which became interchangeable between the male and female 'head of the household' reflecting the social/cultural change at the time. This generic progression, however, was not enough to keep audiences interested, as the success of the anicom was short lived. *The Jetsons* and *Top Cat* only lasted two seasons, and though *The Flintstones* lasted for six years and spawned a number of spin offs later, it like the others was re-scheduled into Saturday morning, with the rest of the children's cartoons. The networks were signalling that the anicom was no longer welcome in prime time.

In his in depth account Jason Mittel (2003 p.276-9), provides an in-depth account of the development of the 'Saturday Morning cartoon', which also raises the issue of the marginalisation of the Hanna Barbera television animation. Mittel discusses the 1960s prime time animation 'boom' describing the shows produced

by other networks in an attempt to emulate the success of *The Flintstones*, (just as the networks did in the 1990s), however while this is useful in terms of historical development, I would argue with his terminology. Mittel refers to the 'cartoon genre' (p.46) which is too wide a term to be used. While the majority of 'cartoons' are indeed comedies, by classifying all of the animated television series as cartoons suggests that they are all the same with no generic difference, however I believe my work has shown this to be false. While the shows in my case studies conformed to the verisimilitude of the sitcom, they also include references to other genres, such as science fiction, super hero, and crime. This issue is also part of the wider problem of definition in animation studies. The very meaning of 'cartoon' has been appropriated to mean animated children's comedy. The dictionary lists no fewer than five different meanings for the word, from a comic drawing, to a caricature. I feel that this is the key to the issue of animation definition and perception. When the shows are termed 'cartoons' the connotation is of a childish thing, whereas I have demonstrated that they (anicoms) are more than that. I would also argue that the term 'cartoon' is not appropriate to the shows I am analysing. Just as comedy has a number of different types within the larger form, so too has the 'cartoon', ranging from slapstick, visual and verbal gags, to the situation comedy. I feel that the term is so general that it fails to do justice to the individual shows. While I disagree with Mittel's terminology I agree with his assertion that the 'cartoons' of Saturday morning were subjected to a generic label of their own which further marginalised the form and its perception with audiences.

Chapter four identified the development of the anicom when Hanna Barbera produced *Wait 'til Your Father Gets Home*, a new animated domestic sitcom, featuring social and cultural commentary on the generation gap and political fears of the country. This show was groundbreaking for the anicom in terms of the ideological issues it raised, however arguably, partly as a result of this the show was not as popular as its predecessors and only lasted two years. The attempt to target a specific adult audience with *Wait 'til Your Father Gets Home* failed, with the show only lasting two seasons. While the show tackled political issues as well as domestic issues, it was never as controversial as its live action counterpart, *All in the Family*, which is perhaps one of the reasons why the show never lasted as long. The lack of interest from the networks and audiences confirmed the apparent decline in the anicom which essentially disappeared in 1974, not to re-appear until 1989.

There was also a show which took advantage of the decades obsession with 'kung fu', *Hong Kong Phooey*, which also spoofed the crime fighter/superhero genre. The third anicom in the 1970s was the zoo based *Help! It's the Hair Bear Bunch* in which the case study revealed similarities to the live action *Hogan's Heroes*. All of these shows conform to the generic conventions of the sitcom, though *Hong Kong Phooey's* narrative was slightly unusual. The narrative was not consistently 'sitcom' in all of the shows in the case study; however the characterisations all conform to the Propp/Grote model. Like the progression in the 1960s with the interchangeable characters, I argued that Grote's 'scoundrel' would be better realised in the 1970s anicoms by Propp's 'villain'. We also saw the shift in the situation, as the workplace became dominant in both the live

action and animated sitcoms. All of this suggests parallel progression within the genre.

Despite the chapter demonstrating the generic status of the shows, it raised a number of questions regarding an apparent decline, which had a great impact on the genre within the 1970s and throughout the 1980s. Television was faced with new audiences, new regulations and pressure from outside groups. All of these factors were addressed in chapter five, which attempted to find a reason for such a shift in the market – the apparent decline the in the popularity and production of the sitcom. After examining all of these factors, including the increasing commodification of animation, it became clear that no single element was responsible for this decline. The political climate, with its commercial driven conservatism influenced the regulations, which affected the content of shows, as well as what networks were willing to broadcast. This ultimately impacted on the sitcom, both live action and animated. The audience's tastes and expectations, as well as viewing choice, had changed as well, evident in the scheduling decisions by the networks. The importance of the audience to genre classification, as well as the importance of the institutional discourse has been a key factor throughout my thesis and is emphasised in this chapter.

I have argued that the genre of sitcom, within which the anicom is part, has developed throughout the four decades of study. By the late 1980s we had seen the emergence of a new form – the anicom and the subsequent decline and virtual disappearance of the form. However while genre ultimately develops, maintaining audience interest, I would argue that it is also cyclical as others have done (Neale 2000 p.212). By 1989 the anicom was at the start of a new cycle, re-

emerging once more to reach new levels of success and become part of mainstream popular culture.

Chapter six, focused this new emerging anicom cycle. The anicom was essentially 're-born' following the success of *The Simpsons* and the perception of animation itself was altered. What had long been a 'children's' medium, animation was now acceptable to adult audiences once more with an increase in animated features in the cinema, for both adults and children. Through the case studies I have been able to identify more generic development in the anicom. Finding success with new adult audiences, the shows were able to push comic boundaries by tackling themes more appropriate for adults. These advances in the comedy were enabled by the animated form and its ability to present what would be impossible in live action, as seen for instance in both *South Park* and *Family Guy.*

The extent of *The Simpsons* phenomenon was explored in the final section of chapter six, by examining the fans negotiation of the shows verisimilitude which surrounded the show. This regeneration of interest was most evident on the Internet fan boards which were the focus of my case study. I found the fans were in a unique negotiation with each other and the producers of the show in a hierarchy of 'knowledge'. The fan base for *The Simpsons* demonstrates the investment that some viewers of the show are willing to make in the interaction with their favourite shows. (This is also true of other anicoms, as well as live action shows).

The audience then emerged with a more important role in generic discourse than previously as they now had the possibility of interaction on the web, cable and

satellite television, as well as more choice in viewing with increased use of VHS in the 1980s and DVD in the 1990s. This choice enabled the viewer to dictate their own schedule which the cable networks responded to by scheduling animation 'threads' aimed specifically at adult audiences.

Anicom – Future?

Through the case study analysis I have confirmed both Sandler (2002 p.202) and Caughie's (1991) theories that the scheduling of the show by the network can have an effect on the categorisation of the show. This is exemplified by the 1994 anicom *The Tick,* which despite its popularity with adults in its print based comic form, was scheduled on a children's channel, categorising it as such. Previously supportive networks have recently been cancelling anicoms, or scheduling them in a time slot which will not encourage a large audience.

This occurred with *Futurama* and the Fox network. The network has long been considered to be supportive of the genre, by premiering, and producing many successful anicoms, however in recent schedules they have reduced the number of anicoms from their schedules. *Futurama* was not renewed for another series, and remaining episodes were held back from broadcast. The show has been picked up in syndication by the Cartoon Network for Adult Swim, with the remaining new episodes airing on FOX. Despite a large fan base, as evidenced by web based campaigns of support for the show, FOX kept *Futurama* in its Sunday night line up but is scheduled immediately after Sunday night football. This early evening time slot is unusual for an adult show, even the family live action show *Malcolm in the Middle* airs at a later time, despite *Futurama* being arguably less suitable for an early evening audience.

Similarly, *Family Guy's* future had looked poor when after the second season it was about to be cancelled, however, following a management restructure at FOX, the show was renewed for another season. Nonetheless it was scheduled on a Thursday night against popular NBC live action sitcom *Friends* and as a result it has not been renewed for a fourth season. [111] Again, like *Futurama*, we see unsupportive scheduling affecting the performance of a show. Upon examining the ratings for the entire life of *Family Guy* it is clear that the key problem was the slot it was given. When the show began it performed well on Sunday nights, but when it changed to a Thursday night in the second year, the ratings dropped dramatically. This is also seen in the first season when, during September it was shown on a Thursday for two nights and the ratings were under half of the previous weeks, then it was put back on to Sunday and the ratings picked right up again.[112]

We return to the same question that we asked in the 1970s chapter regarding the support for shows from the networks in relation to audience expectations. Why do networks reschedule successful shows in different slots which they then fail in? Likewise why do the networks schedule new, or less successful shows against other shows which have proven success as in the case of *Family Guy* against *Friends*? One possible answer could lie in the production of the shows. 20th Century Fox, produces all four anicoms on its network, but both *The Simpsons* and *King of the Hill* are jointly produced by Film Roman, a large and successful animation studio, whereas *Family Guy* and *Futurama* are produced in part by smaller, lesser-known studios. However it seems unusual that a network

[111] Radio interview excerpt from www.stewiesminions.com/interview
[112] The show has since been cancelled and picked up by Adult Swim.

which promotes itself largely on the quality of its animated series line up, would reduce the variety it offers its audiences, especially with such a large fan base evident on the Internet. One possible explanation is provided by Kevin Sandler in his discussion of branding in prime time animation, suggesting that the networks are responsible for the success of the shows they broadcast. This model of fitting the show to the right audience seems simplistically logical, however I have demonstrated, particularly in chapter seven, that the networks often do not follow this simple plan, resulting in errors such as the cancellation of *Family Guy*.

Sandler examines the networks in terms of their 'business' models and how they brand the shows. He suggests that the networks were so keen to capture some of FOX's success with *The Simpsons*, that they clamoured to produce and broadcast as many animated shows as possible regardless of whether they were suitable for their target demographic. Sandler also provides some much needed discussion of the cable channel Cartoon Network and its importance to the success of animation, "Cartoon Network is not just a domestic channel with a Web component; it is a dominant global entity that adapts its programming strategies and brand marketing for all of its international networks." (p.104) this brand recognition is compared to the hegemony of Disney but is given with a warning of the censorship which ultimately comes with 'big business'. This is also seen in the problems the large networks have faced with regulation, which cable channels are less restricted by. I agree that the network's decisions are vital to the success of the anicom, and other animated series, and feel that Sandler has gone some way to answering some of the questions I posed in chapters four and five, as to the reasons for the original decline of the anicom.

One channel which continues to support its anicom line ups is the cable channel Comedy Central. Their most successful show, *South Park* continues after eight seasons and the channel have shown no interest in ending the show. This level of authorial control over a show is unusual in the competitive market, but can be partly explained by the fact that the show is broadcast by a cable channel rather than a big network. The cable channels do not have the same constraints on them as the networks, which was proposed in chapter five as one of the reasons for the increasing competition faced by the networks from the 1980s to the present.

Despite the commonalties of genre, the anicoms chosen in this case study are fairly diverse in appearance, animation style and comedy type. The thesis has argued that this diversity is enabled by the medium of animation. Most live action sitcoms are variations on themes previously used, be it the domestic situation or workplace based and they tend to feature a lot of similar plots. Even new live action shows which may have slightly more controversial themes, use the familiar set up, and through time the original theme has largely been forgotten or diluted into something less shocking. Paul Wells (2002b) argues that "animation can offer a commentary upon genre...but also work as an interrogative tool with which to privilege 'difference' and foreground the distinct credentials of animated forms" (p.48). We have seen this privileging and foregrounding in the anicom where we have sitcoms set in the future, a show starring four foul mouth kids - one of which dies every week, or a family with a megalomaniacal baby and a talking dog, none of which would be feasible or appropriate in live action. Thus the anicom can provide audiences with something that the live action show cannot, particularly a more visual form of comedy.

We have seen however, that despite the continued success of the genre over the last decade, there appears to be a new decline, similar to that of the 1980s. Several long running shows have also been cancelled with little explanation. Jane Feuer (2001:70) suggests that the US sitcom only has limited ideas and therefore when the run exceeds a certain time, the initial appeal has worn off, and any exciting differences or ideals between one show and another become very similar. The FOX network cancelled *Family Guy* with a run of 3 years and *Futurama* 3 years, but has kept *The Simpsons* on its schedules when the show has been running now for 14 years, and according to Feuer's theory should be running out of ideas. However Feuer's notion runs counter to the very nature of genre and in particular the sitcom genre which is by definition repetitive, and the small differences and variation enable its continuing success (for a further discussion of this see Hilton-Morrow & McMahan 2003).

While they may no longer be on prime time network television, many of the shows have found new homes on cable networks, in a late night slot, more appropriate to their adult audiences. The cancellation of *Futurama* and *Family Guy* demonstrated that the audience was not the reason for the decline. Both shows found success on the cable channel 'Cartoon Network's' dedicated adult slot 'Adult Swim' as well as high DVD and VHS sales. In the case of *Family Guy*, it has been suggested on various news websites, that as a direct result of the DVD sales FOX has asked the show's creator Seth MacFarlane to produce new episodes, essentially admitting their mistake in cancelling the show.

When the previous decline in the production of the anicom occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s, there was no alternative in place for the viewing of the anicom.

VHS was still a new technology and cable channels were still emerging. Twenty years on both of these areas have expanded the viewers' choices. In addition to this, the Internet has proved to be a useful tool for fans who wish to engage further with the shows. The increased awareness among audiences has enabled the discourse surrounding animation itself to be opened to new research and the development of new literature, albeit in a limited capacity.

The Anicom

This thesis has argued that the animated series is not merely a sub genre of the sitcom, or an animated version of the television sitcom. One of the problems is in the conception of the sitcom as a television genre rather than a genre which is on the medium of television. The sitcom has been strongly associated, historically, with television however the mode is not limited by a particular medium as evidenced by the sitcoms origins in radio. The close examination of the anicom reveals that "What remains is the *particularity* of animation, and its own conditions of enunciation; conditions which may have been understood as deep structures and generic specificities" (Wells 2002b p.66-67). However while the anicom uses the particularities of the animation to mark out its difference from the live action sitcom it does so within the generic verisimilitude of the sitcom. While the anicom follows the generic conventions of the sitcom it is wrong to suggest that it is a parasitic version of sitcom. The case studies have demonstrated both the uniqueness, and distinctiveness of the anicom and their ability to provide variation and generic progression in the sitcom as well as conformity to the generic verisimilitude. As the genre transcends the medium it inevitably adopts the particularities of the form, as well as recently being able to push the generic boundaries.

In a recent intervention in the debate Michael Tueth examines the family in sitcom with a look at the historical development in live action and anicom, specifically discussing *The Simpsons* and onward but only briefly mentions *The Flintstones*. Tueth suggests that the "innovative had become formulaic" (P.140) and goes on to refer to Bakhtin's notion of 'the carnivalesque' to illustrate the possibilities for subversion and difference in the form. I find the choice of comparison between *The Simpsons, Daria, South Park* and *Beavis and Butthead* rather odd. I have already demonstrated that the latter cannot be defined as a sitcom and as such does not need to conform to the 'linearity' of the others as Tueth suggests. As well as the difference in the shows generic forms, the use of different animation styles and techniques add to the 'difference' in shows. He concludes by suggesting that the subversive nature of animation, enabling the 'content' has progressed the 'family' in television. I would argue with Tueth's choices of show for such a direct comparison; however he does address the potential for negation in animation.

The anicom is not a sub genre of the sitcom despite its conformity to the generic verisimilitude of the sitcom. Marc (1997) described the sub genres of sitcom, the 'magicom' and 'rubecom' which were defined by their themes and iconography – magic and rural settings respectively. However the anicom has the ability to address a number of themes and settings – domestic/ workplace/ sci-fi/ stone age - while maintaining its distinctive variation and difference. The anicom retains the particularities of animation enabling it to remain separate from the live action sitcom, while at the same time conforming to the generic verisimilitude. The sitcom form, though historically linked to the medium of television is manifest in

radio (and now broadcast or 'streamed' on the Internet) as well as live action and the animated form is another manifestation of this.

The anicom is not a subset of the television sitcom however they both generally use the same medium. There is a cultural relay[113] between the forms and an interrelation between the two, in their ability to inspire variation within each other. I would argue that the anicom must be acknowledged as separate and distinctive within the larger genre, and the term anicom does just that. It refers to its generic status as a manifestation of the sitcom, separate in its difference from live action, not just in its use of animation but also its ability to affect the content as Farley (2003) suggests.

In chapter six of my thesis I discussed the emergence of a new adult audience for the animated series – anicoms as well as other animated shows (talk shows in *Space Ghost Coast to Coast* or crime fiction/courtroom drama in *Harvey Birdman Attorney at Law*) – as well as the emergence of new dedicated adult animation time slots in the Cartoon Network's 'Adult Swim' and Comedy Central's night time slot.

As the current line ups suggest (and websites support) there is a definite market for animation of this type which seems to be continuing. It would be pertinent, as further research to examine these shows and the networks to discover how the field is developing into the 21st Century.

The thesis has furthered the question of genre in animation and addressed the neglected field of television animation. In doing so, it has – along with other

[113] The 'cultural relay' here is the cultural relationship between the anicom and the live action sitcom and their shared medium of television.

recently published works such as those within *Prime Time Animation* (2003) – gone some way to filling the gap in the literature and in animation studies. Specifically, this thesis has begun the process of defining and categorising a canon of anicoms, which can be built upon in the future.

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Appendix A - Sitcom Types

Anicoms

O.A.D	Title	Studio/Director	Network	Type	Dominant Type by Decade	Number of main characters	Average number of characters per decade
1960	The Flintstones	Hanna Barbera	ABC	Domestic		5	
1960	Yogi Bear	Hanna Barbera		variety		3	5
1961	Top Cat	Hanna Barbera	ABC	friends		7	
1962	The Jetsons	Hanna Barbera	ABC	domestic/futuristic	domestic	5	
1971	Help its The Hair Bear Bunch	Hanna Barbera		friends/workplace		5	
1972	Wait til your father gets home	Hanna Barbera		domestic		5	
1974	Hong Kong Phooey	Hanna Barbera	ABC	workplace	workplace	4	5
1990	The Simpsons	20th C Fox	FOX	Domestic		5	
1995	Dr Katz	Tom Synder	Comedy Central	Domestic/workplace		5	
1997	King of the Hill	20th C Fox	FOX	Domestic		4	
1997	South Park		Comedy Central	friends		5	
1999	Futurama	20th C Fox	FOX	workplace		7	
1999	Family Guy	20th C Fox	FOX	domestic		5	
1999	Home Movies	Tom Synder	Cartoon Network	domestic/workplace	domestic	5	5

Live Action Sitcoms

O.A.D	Title	Studio/Director	Network	Type	Dominant Type by Decade	Number of main characters	Average number of characters per decade
1960	My Three Sons		ABC	Domestic		5	
1960	Leave it to Beaver		ABC	Domestic		5	5
1961	The Dick Van Dyke Show		CBS	Domestic/workplace		7	
1962	Father Knows Best		ABC	Domestic	Domestic	6	
1971	All in the Family		CBS	Domestic		4	
1972	M*A*S*H		CBS	Workplace		11	
1972	The Bob Newhart Show		CBS	Workplace		5	
1974	The Mary Tyler Moore Show		CBS	Workplace		6	
1978	Taxi		NBC	Workplace	Workplace	5	5
1982	Cheers		NBC	Workplace		6	
1984	Who's the Boss?		ABC	Domestic/workplace		6	
1982	Family Ties		NBC	Domestic		6	
1984	Kate and Allie		CBS	Domestic	Domestic/workplace	5	6
1987	Married with Children		FOX	Domestic		6	
1988	Roseanne		ABC	Domestic/workplace		6	
1989	Seinfeld		NBC	Domestic/singles		4	
1992	Mad About You		NBC	Domestic		6	
1993	Frasier		NBC	Domestic		4	
1994	Friends		NBC	Domestic/singles		6	
1996	Spin City		ABC	Workplace		6	
1997	Just Shoot me		NBC	Workplace	Domestic	5	5

Appendix B - Synopses

1960s

The Flintstones

Episode 15 (1960-1961 Season) **'The Girls Night Out'**

The girls complain that they never get taken out anymore, so the boys oblige. They go a fun park, which the girls hate, wanting something more romantic. While there Fred and Barney make a record in a 'new recording booth' (a bird and a blank disc, the bird's beak is the stylus to record the song). In a hurry to get home and make the girls happier, the record gets left behind, hilarious consequences ensue. A group of teenagers find the record and mistake Fred's bad singing for a hip new sound, it is passed on to a record producer who searches for the mystery crooner. Tracked down by a 'Colonel Parker' type, Fred is transformed into 'Hi Fye' and goes on tour. After 2 weeks the girls are fed up with the touring lifestyle, and want to go home. After the third week Wilma starts a rumour about 'Hi Fye' to turn the teens off and Fred's career is over. They all return home to their lives and end as they began.

Episode 61 (1961 –1962 Season) **'Dino Goes Hollyrock'**

"Hearing about a talent search for a new animal star to appear in 'The Adventures of Sassie', Fred coaches Dino and prepares for an audition. But Dino gets more than he bargained for when he lands the part." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 65 (1962 –1963 Season) **'The Twitch"**

"Wilma is in a dither over finding an act for her auxiliary's benefit show until big mouth Fred boasts that he will line up singer Rock Roll, whose hit song is 'The Twitch'. Now committed, Fred has to pull out all the stops to obtain the rock stars participation." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 92 (1963 –1964 Season) **'Dino Disappears"**

"Upset that Fred has forgotten the anniversary of his joining the household, Dino runs away in a sulk. The next morning Fred and Barney search for him, bringing home a look-alike pet that they assume to be Dino." [Mallory 1999]

Top Cat

Episode 1 (1961 –1962 Season) **'Hawaii Here We Come'**

"When Benny the Ball wins a cruise to Hawaii through a box top contest, he and his pals board the SS Aloha Hooey, with five of the cats sneaking on as stowaways. Officer Dibbles accidentally becomes a fellow passenger by chasing a counterfeiter on board. The gang finds a suitcase filled with (counterfeit) cash and they begin to live like kings, until Dibble catches them and tosses them into the brig. Top Cat devises a clever plan to capture the real counterfeiter, leaving Dibble and the cats free to enjoy the rest of their Hawaiian vacation." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 2 (1961 –1962 Season) **'The Maharajah of Pookajee'**

"Hearing that the rich and benevolent Maharajah (who hands out rubies for random acts of kindness) is staying at a nearby hotel, T.C. and the gang disguise themselves and sneak past Officer Dibble's guard in an attempt to meet the royal.

Mistaking T.C. for the Maharajah, the hotel staff puts him up in a grand suite, where he maintains the pretence by dispensing glass beads as 'rubies' but when the real Maharajah arrives T.C. and the gang high tail it out. Upon finally meeting the Maharajah T.C. assumes he is another impostor and tosses away the bag of rubies that the ruler gives to him." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 6 (1961 –1962 Season) **'The Missing Heir'**

"When the gang realises Benny fits the description of a missing heir they take him to palatial Ridgely Place to collect his inheritance, unaware that the butler, Chutney, and his dog, Griswald, who are next in line for the money, are planning to do away with Benny. Dibble saves Benny from a series of near- fatal mishaps and arrests the butler (who is really Machine Gun Chutney), after which the genuine heir appears. Hoping to cash in, Top Cat lets the heir, a cat named Catwaleder, join the gang, but then discovers that the heir has given away all his money." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 3 (1961 –1962 Season) **'All That Jazz'**

"Jazz, the new cat in town, takes over the pool hall, steals T.C.'s girlfriend, sways the gang and even cleans up the alley. This sparks an ongoing contest of one-upmanship, so when both Jazz and T.C. are offered a part in a Hollywood film, they naturally assume it is another trick. The offer turns out to be legit and Benny the Ball is cast in the starring role in 'The thing from the Alley'. He leaves for Hollywood in a limo, accompanied by T.C and the gang in the guise of Benny's manager, valet, vocal coach, tailor and chauffeur." [Mallory 1999]

Yogi Bear

Episode 16 (1960-1961 Season) **'Disguise and Gals'**

"Two Bandits, disguised as grandmothers, stash $50,000 in stolen loot in a picnic basket. Yogi's devotion to picnic baskets ultimately turns him into a hero when he knocks their wigs off, exposing the crooks and he is credited with their capture." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 13 (1960-1961 Season) **'Bear Faced Disguise"**

"In an attempt to catch Yogi stealing a picnic basket, Ranger Smith disguises himself as a Polar Bear and befriends Yogi and Boo-Boo. The two quickly see through his disguise and refuse to break any park rules in Smith's presence. The Ranger is ultimately so impressed by Yogi's resolve that he practically forces goodies on him." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 12 (1960-1961 Season) **'Love Bugged Bear'**

"When Yogi falls in love with a beautiful girl bear, he suddenly stops scrounging food and dedicates his time to trying to charm his new girlfriend. She eventually deserts him for another bruin beaux, leaving the philosophical Yogi to observe: "I didn't lose a girl, I gained an appetite." [Mallory 1999]

The Jetsons

Episode 9 (1962-1963 Season) **'Elroy's TV Show'**

"Elroy and Astro are tapped star in a new television show, "Space Boy Zoom and his Dog Astro", causing the Spacely's to become jealous. Problems arise during

the filming, though, when George cannot stop making on-set suggestions. To get even, the producer gives George the role of the 'Mad Scientist', a part that calls for him to be pummelled by a robot. Disenchanted with television, George and Elroy quit just as Spacely arrives, begging that his son Arthur be given the part. Elroy passes on the starring role to Arthur, while George sets his boss up by telling him the producer *loves* suggestions." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 15 (1962-1963 Season) **'Millionaire Astro'**

"Astro is discovered to be "Trawlfaz", the long lost dog of zillionaire J. P Gottrockets, who takes the dog away from the Jetsons by a court order. Despite his new life of luxury, Astro/Trawlfaz is only happy when his former owners (who have been granted visitation rights) come to see him. Realising that the dog's happiness is of primary importance, good- hearted Gottrockets sends Astro back to the family he loves." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 5 (1962-1963 Season) **'Jetson's Night Out"**

"In a rare instance of solidarity, George and Mr Spacely alibi each other to get away from their wives in order to go to a robot football game. The scheme works until they are spotted winning a raffle at the televised game by Jane and Mrs Spacely. To redeem themselves, they take their prize, a mink coat, and turn it into a jacket and a stole for their wives, who then demand a *lot* of accessories to go with the mink wraps. Incensed over this development, Spacely fires George." [Mallory 1999]

Episode 3 'The Hippie'

Chet has a new friend, Claude, a hippie and has invited him to dinner. Claude worms his way into staying with the family, and eats all of their food while criticising Harry's politics. He encourages the children to support his ideals, leading Ralph, Harry's neighbour to believe that they are communist sympathisers (as he does every week). He builds a wall to divide them and tries to rally support from the other neighbours. Eventually, Harry decides to beat Claude at his own game by pretending to have changed his ways and become a hippie, thus illustrating that without working there will be no food for the family and Claude won't be able to freeload anymore. It backfires slightly as Claude refuses to go, but as the neighbourhood war escalates, the television company arrives. Impressed by Claude's musical abilities, the television company offers him a lucrative deal, and he sells out, much to the disappointment of Chet. However the family returns to normal and the neighbourhood dispute is over.

Episode 4 **'The Beach Vacation'**

In need of a holiday the family rent a cottage on the beach for two weeks, though Harry may have to still go to work during the week to pay for it! The first day on the beach however poses a problem as three nudists have taken up residence on the beach, much to Harry and Irma's disgust. The children as usual object with protests about human rights. Despite this, Harry gets the police involved, having the guy arrested. In the meantime, Ralph and his vigilante group have set up

watch on the beach to stop the invasion of nudist 'commies'. After chatting to the boy's father, Harry decides that he might actually be a decent kid and drops the charges. Meanwhile it is youngest Jamie who solves the problem by telling the nudist off for ruining his chances of setting up business and charging his friends to use the cottage facilities. Ashamed of getting in the way of enterprise, the nudist decides to leave the beach. The problem is resolved and the family enjoys the rest of their vacation.

Episode 6 **'Love Story'**

While out shopping for a new jacket, Harry and Alice meet a young man named Norman who is looking for change to get the bus to college. Impressed by his ambition Harry give Norman a couple of dollars, but what he doesn't know is that Norman is really a beggar and the college story is a line he uses to get money. Norman and Alice are instantly attracted to each other and decide to go on a date. They have Harry's blessing until he finds out about the begging. Of course Ralph finds out and wants Harry to put a stop to it. Alice protests that her family should accept Norman and the pair decide to get engaged. Upon hearing this announcement, Harry contacts Norman's parents, who turn out to be extremely wealthy. Harry now approves, but Alice decides that Norman is not right for her now that she knows he really has money and was only begging to rebel against his parents, rather an idealist free spirit

Episode 12 'Expectant Papa'

After experiencing some light-headedness and odd cravings over a short period of time Irma and Harry jump to the conclusion that Irma is pregnant. They are

excited until the children protest about the drain another child would be on their resources and the worlds, and Harry's co-workers suggest he is too old to have a young child, and that he will be unable to participate fully in the child's life. The whole thing has also meant that their planned trip to Europe will have to be postponed. Eventually the kids come round to the idea, just as Irma finds out that it was a false alarm, and everything goes back to normal.

Help, It's the Hair Bear Bunch

Episode 3 **'Raffle Ruckus'** (O.A.D. 25th September 1971)

"After Peevly cracks down on the animals and makes them keep the zoo clean, Hair suggests a raffle, which he rigs in his favour, to earn money; the prize is the zoo. After learning Peevly's job is not as easy as it looks, Hair plans to return the zoo to him, only to hear him gloat that Hair will get in line soon. Hair then uses the impending visit by the superintendent to gain concessions for the animals."

Episode 9 **'Gobs of Gabaloons'** (O.A.D 6 November 1971)

After getting in trouble again, the Bunch (along with the other animals) have to build Peevly a new pool and discover a treasure map in the process. The map leads to the area under Peevly's house. After various attempts to get at it, including a spoof of "The Great Escape," Peevly figures out what's going on and forces Hair to give him the map. Hair gives him a fake, but the bunch discovers whatever treasure that is found belongs to the country of Ptomania. The Bunch gives Peevly the real map, and he is forced to make reparations to Ptomania after he spends the treasure.

Episode 12 **'The Bear who came to Dinner'** (O.A.D 27th November 1971)

"The bunch tries to escape via a Trojan Horse but are caught. Just as they are about to be sent to the national park (the Bunch's greatest fear), Square slips on a banana peel carelessly thrown down by Peevly, and fakes being injured. Bananas the Gorilla is enlisted as a doctor (in disguise) to diagnose him as injured and puts him in a body cast, giving Peevly the chance to catch the charade if Square moves even an inch. When Botch finally the Bunch on the town it's a race to see if they can beat the zookeepers back to the zoo."

Episode 16 **'The Diet Caper'** (O.A.D 18 December 1971)

The bears get caught in the act of removing food from Peevly's fridge from a secret door in the back and are punished with a ban on food. The hungry bears try several tricks to get some food, but each time gets caught out. The next plan is named 'Operation Mole' and with the help of the other animals they decide to tunnel from the zoo to the pizza place in town. They get a bit lost and end up in a 'haunted house' which turns out to be part of the funfair. After almost getting caught out again they lead Peevly and Botch into the funfair, except they think they are really trapped in a haunted house. The bears use this time to raid the office fridge with all the other animals. When Peevly and Botch finally get back the bears convince the pair that they are holding a party for Botch's birthday. They get away with the scam because Botch can never remember his own birthday so can't be sure if it's true or not.

Hong Kong Phooey

Episode 1 **'Car Thieves/ Zoo Story'** (O.A.D 7 September 1974)

In 'Car thieves', a couple of thieves are stealing cars around the city. After tricking HKP with their old lady disguise, he manages to catch up with them and foil their plans. 'Zoo story' features a couple of crooks stealing kangaroos from the zoo. They had stashed some loot in one of their pouches but couldn't remember which one, so they kept stealing the animals until it was recovered. HKP stows away to find the hideout and thus foil the crooks plan.

Episode ? **'TV or Not TV/ Stop Horsing Around'** (O.A.D 19 October 1974)

Crooks are stealing all of the televisions in the city, including the one from the police station. HKP hides inside a set in a closed television store so he can be stolen and taken to the crooks hideout. Once inside he can foil their plans. In 'Stop Horsing Around', prize racehorses are being stolen right from the track and HKP decides to ride one in a race to follow the trail. It eventually leads to the circus where the clowns have been stealing the horses and disguising them with paint to use in their show. HKP dresses up as a clown to infiltrate the gang. He foils the plan when he spills water on the horses and the paint comes off, revealing their true identity. Spot helps in this section.

Episode? **'The Claw/ Hong Kong Phooey Vs Hong Kong Phooey'** (O.A.D 2 November 1974)

An unseen thief is stealing gems and paintings from the museum with the aid of large claw on the end of a retractable arm. HKP tries to stop it and finds out that a mad professor is controlling the claw. With the usual help from his 'Hong Kong book of Kung Foo' and Spot, HKP saves the day again.

In the second section, a crook has disguised himself as our hero and is collecting all of the rewards that HKP refuses. After several stints in jail, and several changes back and forward between Penry and HKP, the crook is caught out.

Episode ? **'The Abominable Snowman/Professor Crosshatch'** (O.A.D 9 November 1974)

A pair of crooks are stealing lots of ski and skating equipment so they can open their own winter resort. With the aid of skates on the 'Phooey mobile' HKP and Spot manage to catch up to the crooks, and foil them by freezing them in a block of ice. Professor Crosshatch has managed to crossbreed several species of bird to produce a super bird which he uses to help him steal valuables. As usual our hero inadvertently saves the day. In the meantime the sergeant is trying to take his captain's exam which Penry manages to ruin when handing over the crooks the HKP has 'left' for them.

1990s

Dr Katz, Professional Therapist

Episode 408 'Closets' (O.A.D: 10 August 1997)

"Katz and Ben decide to reorganise their closet space, and they hire a company to do it. But first Ben has several potential bidders check it and he is intimidated by their great knowledge of closets. Katz learns the reason Laura has such well organised closets at home is that she keeps all her winter stuff at the office. Katz doesn't like the final result, because all the compartments are too small." (http://www.ericdsnider.com/katz.html) Guests: Elayne Boosler, Mike Rowe.

Episode 503 **'Old Man'** (O.A.D: 17 June 1998)

After sleeping late one morning, Ben becomes concerned that Katz is becoming an old man and they begin to discuss retirement and the ageing process. Ben

wants Katz to get a boat, but later buys him some paints so he can have a hobby when he retires. Eventually Katz's energy level returns to normal and he declares his plan to continue working for a while longer. In a voice-over during the credits, he and Ben discuss plans to get a mobile home and tour the country. Guests: Gilbert Gottfried, Robert Klein, and Jim Gaffigan.

Episode 514 **'The Waltz'** (O.A.D: 5 October 1998)

"As Katz and Ben prepare to go to Katz's niece Rachel's wedding, Katz discovers that since Uncle Morty is dead, he'll have to dance with Rachel – and he can't waltz. He asks Laura to teach him, and she says no but eventually agrees, for $200 (and he can't touch her)...Ben goes to Vic's Video Palace and rents a waltz instruction tape from employee Todd...Ben is crushed when he learns Katz has already learned to waltz...and a tiff ensues. Later, Katz suggests they waltz together as a way of making up, which they do, until Ben dips his dad and drops him. Notes...Stan and Julie at the bar are not in this episode...Todd Barry's appearance as Todd the video store clerk is the first time a guest has appeared not as himself, and not as a patient, but as another character outside the office. Todd was eventually to become a regular character, like Stan and Julie." (http://www.ericdsnider.com/katz.html) Guests: Ron Lynch, Susie Essman

Episode 605 **'Ben's Partay'** (O.A.D: 13 July 1999)

After hearing from some old friends, who are in town for a short visit, Ben decides to throw a party, but Katz isn't invited, despite his offer to provide the musical entertainment. Ben invites Laura and Todd, who both decline. Dr Katz later meets Laura when he is hanging out at the bookstore, and Todd turns up late

to the party to find out that Ben has been copying tapes from the video store. (He is also the only guest at the party at that point) When Todd's friends turn up, the party gets a bit out of hand with Ben forced outside onto the fire escape to get away from the chaos, though he ends up locked out, and hasn't had a good time. Guests: Al Lubel, Tom Hertz

King of the Hill

Episode 60 (Season 3) **'As Old as the Hills'** (O.A.D: 18 May 1999)

The Hills celebrate their 20th wedding anniversary with a party where friends and Hank's home video remind Peggy how old they have gotten. To give Hank and Peggy some time alone Bobby goes to stay with Cotton, which he hopes will be his grandfather's last chance to spoil him before Didi's baby comes, but Cotton sees it as an opportunity for Bobby to fill in for his pregnant wife's chores. Luanne had arranged to go away camping with friends, but when the trip is cancelled, she sneaks back to the house where she hides for the whole weekend.

After a depression fuelled tequila session, Peggy convinces Hank that they need to spice up their lives by skydiving. Hank jumps and loves it but Peggy is reluctant. Meanwhile, with Cotton out, Didi goes into labour and Bobby has to drive her to the hospital, in Arlen, he doesn't know where the hospital in Houston (maybe Austin) is. He ends up having to be her birthing partner. Back at the sky diving, Peggy finally musters the courage to jump, but both of her chutes fail. A season ending cliff-hanger sees Hank watch helplessly as Peggy falls to the ground.

Episode 62 (Season 4) **'Cotton's Plot'** (O.A.D: 3 October 1999)

The start of season four saw the continuation of the cliff-hanger from the season three finale. In that episode we saw that Peggy survived her fall but is immobilised in a body cast. This episode continues the story with Peggy beginning her rehabilitation program, out of her cast but in a wheelchair. She has difficulty dealing with exercises set for her and feels sorry for herself. When Cotton taunts her when she falls out of her chair and treats her as though she were a soldier, she begins to respond to his harsh treatment. Her rehab progresses well with Cotton constantly telling her stories of his war adventures. He is trying to apply to be buried in the veteran's cemetery, however his chances are almost blown when Peggy realises that his stories contradict each other so he must be making it all up. Disappointed in her new mentor she gives up hope in him, until Hank reminds her that even if some of his details are mixed up he did serve, and lost his shins in the process. This inspires Peggy once more and she helps Cotton to get his 'plot' in the veterans' cemetery.

Episode 66 **'A Beer can Named Desire'** (O.A.D: 14 November 1999)

The episode begins as so many do with the boys standing in the alley drinking beer, however this time there is a purpose to the drinking. In one marked can of Alamo beer is a winning opportunity to throw a football to win $1m, or have a football star throw it for you for $100,000 instead. Hank wins and decides to try his hand at throwing himself for the million. After much practise the family sets of to New Orleans for the game, allowing Bill to tag alone and rediscover his Cajun roots.

While staying with his family, Bill is seduced by three of his cousins; one of home is related by blood, the other by marriage (though they are all widows).

After sleeping with all of them he is asked to leave and catches up with the Hills on their way home. Meanwhile back at the game, Hank decides to let his idol 'Dandy' Don Meredith (playing himself) throw for him. Don misses and Hank is so mad he tackles Don. Later they talk and Hank tries the throw when no one is around, he gets it in but decides he is pleased to have had the honour of meeting a football legend, so doesn't mind too much about the money.

Episode 77 **'Bill of Sales'** (O.A.D: 12 March 2000)

Bored with her current job, Peggy decides to answer and ad to start her own business. It turns out to be a pyramid scheme but Peggy continues, trying to draft Luanne and Hank in to her sales team. The sales are poor until Bill intervenes trying to impress Peggy and sells all of her merchandise. Peggy hires Bill and his skill as salesman takes them to the annual sales convention in San Antonio. When Bill increases their chances of going to the Nationals, Peggy compliments him with a peck on the cheek. Bill becomes furious and quits, leaving Peggy with poor sales again. Hank points out that Bill is only used to poor treatment so Peggy begins to act like a drill instructor to get him back to work. He works really hard and Peggy is pleased until she realises that he is injured from working too much. Unable to continue taking advantage of him, she fires him. He points out that he thinks it's a scam, she agrees, but thinks they had a good time.

South Park

Episode 101 **'Cartman Gets an Anal Probe'** (O.A.D: 18 August 1997)

"While the boys are waiting for the school bus, Cartman explains the odd nightmare he had the previous night involving alien visitors abducting him from his bed. Meanwhile Kyle and Stan try to convince Cartman that the dream was in fact a reality." (http://southparkstudios.com/show/guide.html)

Episode 107 **'Pinkeye'** (O.A.D: 29 October 1997)

"The first Halloween episode starts off with the failure of the Mir Space Station, which crashes right on Kenny. An ambulance comes and takes his body off to the morgue. The boys start to brag about their Halloween costumes. At the morgue, a freak accident involving a bottle of Worcestershire occurs, and next thing you know Kenny is a member of the undead. Kenny breaks free and wanders off into the night." (http://southparkstudios.com/show/guide.html)

Episode 109 **'Starvin Marvin'** (O.A.D: 19 November 1997)

"It's Thanksgiving! Genetically altered turkeys are on the rampage in South Park, and Cartman in mistaken for a starving Ethiopian." (South Park season 1 DVD)

Episode 204 **'Ike's Wee Wee'** (O.A.D: 20 May 1998)

"Ike's going to have a Briss and everyone is invited! Stan, Kenny, and Cartman find out what a Briss really is and try to warn Kyle that his parents are going to cut off Ike's wee wee. Kyle sends Ike away to protect him from his scissors wielding parents." (http://southparkstudios.com/show/guide.html)

Futurama

Episode 1 **'Space Pilot 3000'** (O.A.D: 28 March 1999)

"After an accidental cryogenic freezing, Fry awakens at the dawn of the year 3000. With the help of his two new friends, a degenerate robot named Bender and a beautiful one-eyed alien named Leela, Fry defies his life assignment as a delivery boy. He tracks down his great, great etc. nephew, Professor Farnsworth, who hires the three to work for his intergalactic delivery service. It's a brave new world and Fry is in for the time of his life."

Episode 4 **'Love's Labours Lost in Space'** (O.A.D: 13 April 1999)

"On a mission to save endangered animals from a collapsing planet, lonely Leela meets legendary starship captain Zapp Brannigan – who (at least in his own opinion) is the universe's greatest ladies man."

Episode 6 **'A Fishfull of Dollars'** (O.A.D: 27 April 1999)

"Fry discovers he's a billionaire because his savings have been accruing interest for 1000 years. Caught up in the excitement of his riches, he squanders his fortune to buy an unopened can of anchovies – extinct since the year 2200. What he doesn't realise is that Mom, the head of a mega-conglomerate, will do anything – even use Pamela Anderson's head in a jar – to get her hands on those anchovies."

Episode 12 **'When Aliens Attack'** (O.A.D: 7 November 1999)

"The Omicrons threaten to destroy the earth if they can't see the last episode of a lost 20th century television series 'Single Female Lawyer' starring an unmarried human female, who wears very short miniskirts, struggling to succeed in a

human man's world. Because someone destroyed the last episode by spilling beer on the transmitter (think Fry) the crew from Planet Express must deliver their version of 'Single Female Lawyer'. (DVD Season 1 box set, 2002, 20th Century Fox)

Family Guy

Episode 2 **'I Never Met the Dead man'** (O.A.D: 11 April 1999)

"While teaching Meg to drive, Peter crashes into a satellite dish and knocks out the city's cable. He goes crazy without television, until Lois suggests he spend more time with his family. This plan backfires when Peter drives his family nuts. Meanwhile after Lois forces Stewie to eat his broccoli, he attempts to destroy all vegetables by building a weather control device. Erik Estrada makes a guest voice appearance."

Episode 3 **'Mind over Murder'** (O.A.D : 25 April 1999)

"When Peter goes to Chris' soccer game, he inadvertently punches a woman he thought was a man. Restless under house arrest, Peter turns the basement into a bar and Lois ends up stealing the show. Meanwhile, Stewie attempts to create a time machine to avoid teething pain. Erik Estrada makes a guest voice appearance."

Episode 5 **'A Hero Sits Next Door'** (O.A.D: 2 May 1999)

"When a bubbly new family moves next door, Peter gets annoyed. Lois becomes fast friends with Debbie, Meg tries to pick up on son Kyle and Peter is forced to invite Joe to play on his company baseball team. But when Joe shows up to the

game in a wheelchair and wins the crowds' heart with slick manoeuvres and winning plays, Peter decides he wants to be a hero too."

Episode 12 **'Love Thy Trophy'** (O.A.D: 14 March 2000)

"When their *Who's the Boss* float takes top prize in the Quahog Harvest Day Parade, the neighbourhood literally goes to war over who gets custody of the trophy. Meanwhile, in an effort to get big tips at her new waitressing job, Meg tells customers that Stewie is her illegitimate crack baby. When family services investigate, and finds the Griffin home in the middle of a war zone, they take custody of Stewie. Once everyone finds out that Stewie's in foster care, the neighbourhood declares peace and plots a rescue mission."

Home Movies

Episode 207 **'Dad'** (O.A.D: 17 February 2002)

Brendon is finally going to meet his father and spend the weekend with him. After a slow start, and some confusion over a 'hands – free' phone call, they begin to get along with a plan to start the weekend at the zoo. Once they arrive they meet Brendon's dad's girlfriend, Linda. She seems younger than Andrew, and constantly complains about her day. Later, back at Andrew's apartment Linda complains again after she finds out that Brendon has been using her stuff, and she and Andrew argue. The next morning they argue again and it seems like they don't get on too well. But later, back at the zoo, Andrew tells Brendon of his intention to propose to Linda. Paula decides to invite the couple to dinner where Brendon takes the opportunity to show his father the new film he has been working on. The 'historical' drama featuring a couple like Anthony and

Cleopatra who have a fight which bears an uncanny resemblance to the ones Brendon witnessed between Linda and his father. Despite yet another argument at dinner the engagement is still on. Meanwhile, at soccer practise, Coach McGuirk introduces 'Eddie' a special child who needs special attention. Later we learn that Eddie moved away, and McGuirk is looking into being a big brother, but he wants a sick kid.

Episode 210 **'History'** (O.A.D: 10 March 2002)

"The classic "Starboy" episode! Brendon's sci-fi creation, Starboy, with his side-kick, the Captain of Outer Space must stop the arch-fiend George Washington, Annie Oakley, and Picasso from destroying the earth with a terrifying weapon: Washington's cat Mr Pants. Whilst in real life, Brendon finds himself wondering why he is failing history..." (http://www.tvtome.com/HomeMovies/guide.html)

Episode 211 **'Writer's Block'** (O.A.D: March 2002)

The school writer's fair is coming up and Brendon has a bad case of writer's block. His mom has no such problem as her romance story progresses well until the end of the episode. Meanwhile Coach McGuirk has been having problems sleeping and ends up in a sleep study at the local university. He thinks it's a bad idea until he finds out how much money he can make as a test subject. With a DVD player in sight he tries to go without sleep for as long as possible but in the end collapses at the clinic into a sound sleep groaning 'DVD'.

Episode 212 **'Pizza Club'** (O.A.D: 24 March 2002)

Brendon and his dad have formed the 'pizza club' where they meet to have pizza together. McGuirk is jealous of Brendon's new relationship with his father and wants to join the club. He turns up to the pizza place in an attempt to be invited to join, but with no luck. He tries to win Brendon's affections by giving him a bike, but his dad already got him one, and anyway the bike belongs to Mr Lynch. Meanwhile Dwayne's band is in a local competition and Brendon decides to make a documentary, (to be around his crush Cynthia). Despite the advice from his dad, Brendon fails to impress Cynthia, but Dwayne's band wins the contest. Paula has also taken an interest in the filmmaking, and keeps getting in the way. In an attempt to appease the acting bug, they give her a small walk on part in the current film project, it seems to work. McGuirk tries to form his own pizza club with Walter and Perry but discovers they are both lactose intolerant and can't eat it. After an argument with Brendon at soccer, McGuirk is finally accepted into the club.

Appendix C - Nitpicking "The Simpsons": Critique and Continuity in Constructed Realities

Like many television shows, "The Simpsons" has a number of websites devoted to it, ranging from the official site sponsored by Fox, the show's television network, to sites set up and run by fans, with no official endorsement by the producers of the series. The latter allow fans of the program to contribute to the compilation of a thorough reference resource of episode guides and other databases. One means by which these fans demonstrate their knowledge of the program is through fault finding, or 'nitpicking'—citing their observations about various aspects of the series. This 'nitpicking' can be seen as part of an ongoing negotiation over 'ownership' between the show's fans and the show's creators.

Fault finding occurs by means of discussion groups on topics ranging from the story arcs and individual plots to the show's animation style and guest appearances. These discussion groups provide a mediated forum for fans to share their opinions on individual episodes and the quality of the show's writing and to share information on upcoming plot development. As well as providing a reference guide for viewers of the show, the contributors, as fans themselves, are able to engage with each other. This opportunity allows the fans to establish a sense of their shared ownership of the series, at the same time strengthening the fan culture surrounding it.

"The Simpsons" was created by underground cartoonist Matt Groening to be part of the programming that appeared on the Fox Television Network in America when it began broadcasting in the late 1980s. The series began as thirty-second

'interstitials' (surrounding commercials) for "The Tracey Ullman Show" in 1987. It first appeared in its thirty-minute form in December 1989 and officially began in a half-hour prime-time slot in January 1990. The show centers on the Simpson family, which consists of the parents, Homer and Marge, and 2.5 children, Bart, Lisa and Maggie, plus various relations and friends. It is set in the fictional location of Springfield, which is supposed to depict the 'average' American town. The family, too, is 'average'—with the exception that in their animated form the characters have yellow skin and four fingers on each hand. The series follows the generic regime of a type of live-action family sitcom; the family members are extremely dysfunctional, often outwardly violent to one another, but ultimately they remain together throughout their series of weekly 'adventures'.

"The Simpsons" began its fourteenth season in 2003, making it one of the longest running comedy series on television. The popularity of the show has grown considerably from its small 'cult' fan base when it was produced for "The Tracey Ullman Show" to the show's huge mainstream success as a series. However, despite this movement into a broad commercial realm, there is still an exclusive community of fans who pride themselves on knowing more than the 'mass audience' or 'general fan'. This paper first discusses "The Simpsons" in terms of narrative structure and generic verisimilitude, then examines the fans' own engagement with the question of the show's reality and realism. It draws examples from discussions found one of the most popular websites devoted to the series, "The Simpsons Archive" (http://www.snpp.com).

Development of the 'anicom'

"The Simpsons," and a number of other 'anicoms', differ from other forms of television animation in their employment of live-action narrative conventions commonly associated with sitcom series. Aside from feature-length productions, the most common format for the animated cartoon was, for many years, the seven-minute variety originally released in theaters; these are typified by Warner Bros.'s "Looney Tunes" and "Merrie Melodies" shorts. By the early 1960s, the format of cartoons was changing. There was an increasing demand for children's programming on television, which required the industry to produce animation to fill half hour time slots.[1]

One result was the emulation of the variety show, already popular in live-action comedy, stringing a number of shorts together to create one half-hour show. This process changed again when (infrequently) television networks developed programs for primetime, which would be suitable for the whole family. The first animated sitcom to prove successful in primetime, Hanna-Barbera's "The Flintstones," was based on characters in a popular live-action sitcom, "The Honeymooners."[2]

"The Flintstones" focused on the relationship between two couples, set against a prehistoric background. Using dinosaurs to provide 'technology', the show was an amusing commentary on consumerism in America and led the studio to develop other animated sitcoms that aired in primetime, such as "The Jetsons" (1962-1963) and "Wait 'til your Father gets Home" (1972-1974).[3] The relative success of these and other series proved that made-for-television animation could be marketed to a wide audience, appealing to adults as well as children. The

animation industry as a whole—and particularly made-for-television animation—was depressed through most of the 1980s. However, that downturn changed with the arrival of "The Simpsons."[4]

The appeal of "The Simpsons"

Though "The Simpsons" follows in a generic pattern set by earlier series, it is the innovations in the program that have contributed to its immense success. Paul Cantor observes that the series " . . . takes up real human issues everybody can recognize and thus ends up . . . less 'cartoonish' than other [animated] television programs."[5] This is achieved through the construction of an entire 'reality' for the characters to inhabit that is as detailed as in any live-action television show.[6] It has been said that "The Simpsons" actually aspires to move beyond the live-action sitcom in some respects; for example, "one of Matt Groening's intentions in creating 'The Simpsons' was to make the audience forget they were watching a cartoon by portraying a fuller range of human emotions than that presented in most live-action sitcoms."[7] This 'constructed reality', created originally for the lead characters (Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie), has grown significantly since the show's inception as a series to include a large number of other characters within the Springfield community.

The show's humor, which is likely the biggest reason for its success, is derived from physical comedy as well as satirical references to American culture, both popular and political. It is in appreciating these various types of humor that a potential divide in the audience occurs—between the viewer who enjoys the comedy and slapstick nature of the show and the 'knowing fan' who recognizes the self-conscious intertextuality of the jokes. Jim Collins suggests that such

intertextuality is the hallmark of "quality television" and implicit in postmodern popular culture.[8] Recognition of the references, or a "knowingness," as Andrew Tolson describes it, "reinforces our credentials as members of the mass mediated world culture."[9]

Executive Producer Mike Scully suggests that there are two groups in the show's audience, using his own family to illustrate those who laugh at the 'lowbrow' and those who also appreciate the 'intellectual'. He explains, "I love the mix of intellectual and lowbrow humor . . . I tend to laugh more at some of the verbal jokes, while the kids will be laughing at Homer falling down the stairs."[10] Although Scully refers specifically to children, a similar notion can be used to describe the general audience of viewers. This segmentation creates a kind of hierarchy, which helps to explain the types of 'fandom' one finds operating in relation to the show.

An audience hierarchy

Pierre Bourdieu created a model that suggests a hierarchy of audience, within which one finds a struggle for varying levels of 'sophistication'.[11] On top of the audience hierarchy lies another level, that of the artist. Though Bourdieu discusses audiences related to products such as art or poetry, the concept of a hierarchy also can be used here to classify viewers of "The Simpsons" into levels. They can be thought of as mass audience, general fan, exclusive fan, and artist/creator.

In Bourdieu's example, fans are at the top of the audience hierarchy, but are constantly striving to reach the next hierarchical level, that of the artist. Accordingly, atop the hierarchies related to "The Simpsons," we find the series'

writers, producers, directors and other creative personnel, all of whom function as the equivalent of Bourdieu's 'artist'. Fans of "The Simpsons" try to assert their place in the exclusive 'artist' group; they attempt this by keenly seeking out subtle details related to the 'constructed reality' of the show and demonstrating this knowledge. Their information forms the basis of discourse about continuity and program structure, which translates into 'exclusive' knowledge demonstrated on the website. That activity assures their high position in the audience hierarchy, suggesting that they are heading toward the artist level.[12]

Fans who participate in such nitpicking engage in basically two types of critical behavior: first, they notice all of the deliberate cultural and satirical references found in an episode, matching the producers' knowledge, and second, they spot apparently unintentional continuity errors, marking their superiority over other general viewers and the show's producers. So, as part of their discourse on continuity, the fans closely monitor any mistakes that have been made throughout the life of the series. These observations range from simple discrepancies, such as shifts in a character's hair color or a change in the Simpson's address, to a major change in characteristic. For example, eight year-old Lisa is a vegetarian, the subject of a whole episode, called *Lisa the Vegetarian* (1995); however, as a fan has pointed out, in a later episode, *My Sister, My Sitter* (1997), it appears that she has meat on her plate.

The function of 'nitpicking'

Intense interest in the production details of "The Simpsons" has led to the formation of online forums dedicated to 'nitpicking'. One of them can be found within a popular website, "The Simpsons Archive," which was launched online

in 1994 and receives millions of hits per month.[13] "The Simpsons Archive" includes sections called 'Episode Capsules,' where detailed synopses are produced, as well as a variety of sub-sections, such as "did you notice . . ." for noting movie, television and other cultural references; "animation goofs" for posting errors in continuity and in the animation itself; and "comments and other observations." The website also invites detailed critique of entire seasons and comparisons to "Futurama," Groening's other prime-time animated sitcom. In its various forums, "The Simpsons Archive" actively promotes the distinction between the mass audience, general fan and exclusive fan in its encouragement of submissions—even providing a guide to ensure that the appropriate style is followed. A specific section of the site, "Tell Us How Much of a Fan You Are," allows each fan to describe his or her own status.[14]

Fans use the website to showcase their knowledge of the satirical references found in 'real life': American culture, society and politics, as well as other media, including film, television and print comics. The fans' ability to recognize these references establishes their position above the mass audience. Those 'general fans' whose nitpicking is submitted and accepted into the archive are elevated to the higher position of 'exclusive fan' in the hierarchy. These submissions are, as Bourdieu suggests, "opportunities to experience or assert one's position in social space, as a rank to be upheld."[15]

This 'rank' is indeed upheld as many contributors become recognizable when they contribute to multiple Episode Capsules. As a result, they are seen as 'authorities' to the general fans who use the site only as a reference source, particularly if the name recurs many times. A random survey of the Episode

Capsules reveals the name of one contributor, David Hall, in six out of seven sections viewed. For example, one entry reads, "Dave Hall observes that when Patty drives off, there appears to be street lamps (seen from the rear-view mirror), but from Skinner's point of view, there are none to be found."[16] Hall's entry demonstrates an analysis of the verisimilitude of the mise-en-scene, a criticism related to elements of realism in the episode. The concept of realism is an important one in this paper, as it is the fans' sense of the Simpson family's reality that motivates many of their nitpicking responses to the episodes.

Realism and constructed realities

There are numerous ways of considering the concept of 'realism' in a television series. Corner contends that, in general terms, the notion of realism can be broken down into two forms, "the project of verisimilitude [. . .] like the real" and "the project of reference [. . .] about the real."[17] In "The Simpsons", the medium of animation and the character designs themselves work against a true 'verisimilitude' in the series. Clearly, characters that have yellow skin and pointy hair cannot be considered to be 'like the real'. On the other hand, the cultural references and even the 'real life' issues (such as poverty, infidelity, war, and nuclear power) dealt with in the series create a strong sense of being 'about the real'.

Abercrombie, et al. argue that there are three features which suggest realism in fictional television: the physical nature of the television as a "window on the world"; the narrative, "which has rationally ordered connections between events and characters [. . .] organized by rational principles"; and "the concealment of the production process."[18] Normally, television series work to make the

production process 'invisible' to the audience. However, the writers of "The Simpsons" refer directly to this notion of 'concealment of production' in several episodes of the show. One example occurs in *Mom and Pop Art* (1999), where Homer is visiting the local art gallery and is critical of an artwork by Simpsons creator Matt Groening. After he makes his comments, a large pencil appears as if to erase him, as the animator tried to do to Daffy Duck in *Duck Amuck* (1953, dir. Chuck Jones), but the audience soon discovers that the pencil is merely a large part of a sculptor's installation.

In terms of television series, one can also add another measure of realism, that of 'continuity' (maintaining the real over time). If there are lapses in the continuity of a series, its credibility as real also lapses, thus enabling 'nitpicking'. In terms of "The Simpsons", the fans' observations of both intended satire and any continuity errors made are well known by the writers—and even have been subject of references within the series. An example occurs in the Halloween episode *Treehouse of Horror X* (1999), which features the popular live-action adventure series character Xena, from "Xena, Warrior Princess." The fans at a sci-fi convention ask questions about glaring continuity errors in the show, to which the actress repeatedly responds, "A wizard did it." This comment on verisimilitude, though sarcastic, asserts the writers' control of the show over the fans. Xena puts the fans 'in their place', dismissing their observations and basically telling them not to question the writers.

In a season eleven episode, *Behind the Laughter* (2000), the writers address some common complaints made by fans. The show parodies the VH1 music documentary format of "Behind the Music," where members of bands, generally

past their prime, are interviewed candidly about their successes and failures. In the episode, the Simpson family is the subject of a documentary as the stars of a weekly sitcom (about their family's antics). It is part parody of the music program and part self-reflexive criticism, critiquing many elements of the show which the fans have criticized over the years.

The most heavily criticized change to most television shows is the addition of a new character. As Grote suggests, most people think "any change is a sign of desperation, not a sign of plot development."[19] Indeed, the attempt to add new life to an old show is a technique used many times in live-action sitcoms, with the result often worse than the original problem.[20] A commentary on this technique is included in an episode of "The Simpsons" called *The Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie Show* (1997), which also addresses fan culture.

In the episode, a new character is included in the cartoon within the series, "The Itchy and Scratchy Show." At the same time, a new 'house guest' is added to the Simpson household: the character 'Roy', who parodies the 'Fonz' from long running sitcom "Happy Days." The new character, 'Poochie' in the "Itchy & Scratchy Show" is included when the network sees the ratings falling. They search for new voice talent and end up hiring Homer. Before the show is aired, Homer attends a fan convention and is overwhelmed by the question session. Like 'Xena' in the aforementioned Halloween episode, he cannot deal with the level of detail in the questions. Rather than make up an answer, he simply declares that the conference-goers are geeks, presumably because he thinks they are taking it too seriously, another direct comment to the show's fans.

While the *Itchy & Scratchy & Poochie* episode was clearly parodying "Happy Days", it also included an acknowledgement of fans in the heavily satirical reference to fan culture at the convention. This reference was met with mixed and often extreme reactions from the 'nitpickers' on "The Simpsons Archive." In the review section of the Episode Capsule, some fans seemed happy, even flattered, that the writers were paying attention to them, as the following comments suggest.

"Hmm. I guess the writers read this newsgroup after all. Eh? . . . "

"Well, there was an episode [aimed] directly at us, the hardcore fans . . . the portrayal of the fans was a little too on-target . . . And they're absolutely right."

"The scenes in the comic book store can ONLY be fully appreciated by us 'hardcore' fans . . . I think it finally proves that the writers ARE reading this newsgroup . . . it's always nice to see yourself on TV."

"This episode takes a terrific look at the often dicey relationship between a show and its viewers."[21]

Significantly, these comments make distinctions between the authors themselves, the 'hardcore' fans, and the general 'viewers'. By commenting on the inclusion of direct references to themselves, the 'fans' reassert their rank in the hierarchy, above the 'mass audience' as they are at a high enough level to be recognized by those at the top. The above writers enjoy the recognition. However, some fans were not so impressed, as demonstrated in their contributions to the same review section on the site.

"The jokes clearly prove the writers can't differentiate those who are annoyed with minor details like animation flaws from those who notice a decline [. . .] of the show [. . .] The episode was an outrage. It was very inconsiderate of the fans . . . "

"My, oh my. When the writers spend a whole episode pointing at you, a mere paragraph seems small as a reply. Were they bluntly asking us to shut the hell up ("**you** owe **them**")?"[22]

Again, the 'fans' are making their own distinctions in the hierarchy, differentiating between the levels. These comments also suggest that the contributors felt as though the writers were imposing their position in the hierarchy upon them, as though they were being reprimanded for criticizing the top rank, as Homer does in *Mom and Pop Art*.

The fans, then, enter into a further discussion with the writers through the episodes themselves. After an episode airs, it is followed by fan response. The writers then reply to the fans through another episode and so the process continues. This ongoing dialogue locates the fans at a higher position, as they have become part of the process of production of the show. In this process, the fans never really achieve any 'real' status change—though they engage with the process regardless.

This dialogue has been described by Henry Jenkins as a conflict "which has had to be actively fought or at least negotiated between fans and producers in almost every media fandom."[23] As Jenkins suggests, this conflict is a common one between the fan and producer. The web-site becomes a site of negotiation

between different hierarchical levels, as fans, "unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons."[24] The cultural canon is formed not only by the show itself, but also by the creation of "The Simpsons Archive" as a canon of web-based resource material. This negotiation between all levels of the audience hierarchy ultimately leads to creations of a new form of authorship within the interactive space of "The Simpsons Archive" website. In that sense, fans attain the level of artist in some respect, insofar as they are authoring significant texts that enter into the cultural arena.

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[1] In America, the 'half hour' is not actually thirty minutes long, since advertising takes up part of the air time. Today, an 'half hour' animated show runs about twenty-two minutes.
[2] "The Flintstones" first aired in primetime on 30 September 1960, but it moved to a daytime slot the following year. "The Flintstones" was produced for six seasons, from 1960 to 1966.
[3] "The Jetsons" was produced from 1962 to 1963 and "Wait 'til your Father Gets Home" ran from 1972 to 1974.
[4] The decline of the anicom in the 1980s was due to a number of factors, including the economics of the television networks, broadcasting regulations and political climate. This area is the subject of chapter in my PhD thesis. [completion December 2003]
[5] Paul Cantor, "Atomistic Politics and the Nuclear Family," *Political Theory* 27: 6 (1999): 735.
[6] Lawrence Grossberg, 'The In-difference of Television,' *Screen* 28:2 (1987), 35.
[7] Dan Korte, "The Simpsons as Quality Television," *"The Simpsons" Archive* (Nov 1997). Online at http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/dk.paper.html.
[8] Jim Collins, "Television and Postmodernism," *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert Allen (London: Methuen, 1992), 334.
[9] Tolson, Andrew. *Mediations, Text and Discourse in Media Studies*. London: Arnold. (1996), 13.
[10] Scully, quoted in Jon Horowitz, "Mmm . . . Television: A Study of the Audience of "The Simpsons" (1999), "*The Simpsons" Archive*. Online at http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/jh.paper.html.
[11] Bourdieu's divisions are 'no audience', 'mass audience', 'intellectual audience' and 'bourgeois audience'. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1993), 49.
[12] These concepts are discussed by Tulloch and Jenkins, in Abercrombie & Longhurst 1998 p.147),
[13] Though there are general television sites, such as jumptheshark.com and televisionwithoutpity.com, that feature the same sections, "The Simpsons Archive" focuses exclusively on the series.
[14] "Tell Us How Much of a Fan You Are," *The Simpsons Archive.* Online at www.snpp.com/guides/geekcode.html .
[15] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. London: Routledge. (1984), p.57.
[16] David Hall, *"The Simpsons" Archive*. Online at www.snpp.com/episodes/7F15.html.
[17] John Corner, *Studying Media: Problems of Theory and Method* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1998), 70.
[18] Nicholas Abercrombie, *Television & Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 9-40, 27. See also Nicholas Abercrombie and Brian Longhurst, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), 147.

[19] David Grote, *The End of Comedy: Sitcom and the Comedic Tradition* (CITY: Archon, 1983), 71, 162-63.

[20] The attempt to add new life to an old show is a technique used many times in live-action sitcoms, with the result often worse than the original problem. One of the most notable cases of this was in the American sitcom "Mork and Mindy" when after several years of declining ratings; the writers added a new character in the shape of Mork's adult, alien baby. This move proved fatal to the success of the show, and as a result was cancelled.

[21] The contributors cited are Dale G. Abersold, Jonathan S. Haas, Sean J. O'Neal, Benjamin J. Robinson. "The Simpsons" Archive. Online at http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F12.html

[22] The writers were identified as Ondre Lombard and "Yours Truly." "The Simpsons" Archive. Online at http://www.snpp.com/episodes/4F12.html

[23] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 32.

[24] Jenkins, 18.